**University of Alberta**

# Radical Representations of the Virgin and the Hag in Three Irish Plays: *The Playboy of the Western World, Juno and the Paycock,* and *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Drama

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 2004

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*Your file Votre référence*
*ISBN: 0-612-95639-3*
*Our file Notre référence*
*ISBN: 0-612-95639-3*

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# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following members of my committee, Dr. Piet Defraeye and Dr. Patricia Demers for their patience and works. I am really grateful to my supervisor Dr. Rosalind Kerr for all of her supports, her patience, and her guidance. Through the most difficult time, she had encouraged me to keep working and guided me to pursue this work through her insightful critique. I greatly thank to her for helping me as I finally achieve my dream through her guidance. It would never be possible without her kindness and her support.

Thanks to my family for their love. With all my heart, I thank my mom, Okran Seo, and my dad, Mankyu Kwak. I really thank my sisters, Mikyeung, Miyoung, Miran, Misun, Hyunjung, and my brother Hodong.

I thank all of my friends. I thank Adam, Diane, Eileen, Eva, Haneul, Judith, Kahyun, Leo, Lily, and Wenxiang for their care and kindness. Many thanks to Satoshi Ozeki. Especially I thank Kate Boorman for her sharp critique and also for her amazing spirit pushing me to keep going until I finished this work.

I want to thank the Drama Department for giving me a great chance to pursue my study and for awarding me the Winspear Harriet Snowball Scholarship.

I also thank English Department at Kangwon National University. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Kyungshim Oh for her wonderful support and encouragement.

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# Introduction

Irish Literature is noted for its legendary female figures who over the centuries have come to symbolize the colonized nation of Ireland itself. The three playwrights whom I have chosen to examine have made a very important contribution to this tradition because each has tried to break away from the idealized representations of Irish women that were developed in the late nineteenth century to encourage the Irish people to support the nationalist cause. Although the nationalist writers tried to avoid the negative stereotype of the Stage Irishman,[1] they embraced the positive stereotype of the Stage Irishwoman,[2] so that "the lives of actual Irish women were arguably colonized by Irish men."[3] Such an abstract portrayal of female characters as mythic figures like Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan[4] clearly subordinated the interests of women to a sacrificial paradigm of male patriotism.[5] The oppressive conditions that characterized the lives of most Irish women remained outside the realm of literature. In *The Playboy of the Western World*,[6] J.M. Synge was the first Irish dramatist to challenge the unrealistically noble representation of women in Irish plays, Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*,[7] which followed some twenty years later, also offered a revisionist portrait of female heroism. Finally, in his savagely ironic *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*,[8] the contemporary playwright Martin McDonagh destroys all the past mythologies depicting Irish womanhood.

In this thesis, I will explore the different ways in which these three playwrights have demystified their central female characters. In addition to locating the playwrights in their historical contexts, I will discuss these dramatists' deliberate attack on idealized women's roles and realized mother-daughter relationships. I have

focused on the portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship in these three plays because it has traditionally been ignored in criticism written by men, who have focused on the father-son relationship. These mother-daughter relationships reveal that playwrights' characterizations, while distinct from one another, all deconstruct female stereotypes. However, these characters' reality limits their freedom because they are trapped in their patriarchal societies.

As one of the finest dramatists in Irish literature, Synge has been acclaimed as "a solitary pioneer taking his images of Ireland into an art which asserts itself in ways characteristic of modernist practices."[9] Synge's masterpiece *The Play of the Western World* is also remembered because of the notorious riots caused by its first performances. When *The Playboy of the Western World* was produced for the first time on January 26, 1907 at the Abbey, this performance shocked the public. The most severe riots broke out during its opening-night performance, and Synge was accused of being "a Paris bohemian who went to the west of Ireland to write slanderous plays about the peasants."[10] However, Yeats' prophecy about Synge proved to be correct, for Yeats had said, "I am certain that, in the long run, [Synge's] grotesque plays with their lyric beauty, their violent laughter, *The Playboy of the Western World* most of all, will be loved for holding so much of the mind of Ireland."[11] Synge's grotesque realism distorts reality but also reflects it. Synge presents "the wildness," or, in other words, "the vices" of the Irish peasantry through his grotesque realism. Synge liberates his characters from the stereotypes of national idealism, and therefore, his dark comedies were unsettling and disturbing to the Irish nationalists. He began a radical attack against Irish social conventions in *The Playboy*

*of the Western World*, in which "a marginalized figure finds voice and gesture to revolt against oppressive circumstances."[12]

Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* was premiered at the Abbey on March 30, 1924. Achieving enormous success at the Abbey as a new playwright, O'Casey brought Dublin slum characters onto the theatre stage. After Synge's death, the Abbey was troubled with financial difficulties caused by the Civil War and the lack of good plays. When the Abbey was losing its momentum, O'Casey arrived with his Dublin trilogy. "Sean O'Casey was the first and only great playwright who wrote for the Abbey Theatre about the real Ireland. Yeats wrote about the Ireland of his imagination, and Synge imposed his genius on the peasants. But O'Casey was of the people and sang of their sorrows and joys" (Kavanagh 129). *Juno and the Paycock* gained enormous success during the twenty-year history of the Abbey. However, O'Casey's success did not mean that he presented what audiences wanted to see on the stage. He presented the Irish people with a vision of the costs of fighting Ireland's hopeless Civil War. Thus, O'Casey continued Synge's revolutionary depiction of misplaced romanticism and expressed his own anti-heroic vision of life by writing about Dublin slum people involved in "desperate, sometimes fatalistic, struggles against tradition, materialism, religion, nationalism."[13]

Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* was first presented at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway, on February 1, 1996, and opened at London's Royal Court Theatre Upstairs on 29 February 1996 to huge commercial success and critical acclaim. This play won three major London awards during the year of its first production: the George Devine Award for Most Promising Newcomer, the Writers'

Guild Award for Best Fringe Theatre Play, and the Evening Standard Award for Most Promising Playwright. In 1997, McDonagh became the first playwright since Shakespeare to have four plays performed simultaneously in London: The Leenane Trilogy and *The Cripple of Inishmaan*. Although McDonagh was born in England to Irish parents, his drama is located in the Irish dramatic tradition. McDonagh is one of "a new generation of playwrights [who] began to pick up the pieces of the old, shattered, traditional Ireland and hold them up to the light."[14] McDonagh blends the traditional Irish dramatic narrative of his predecessors, particularly Synge, with post-modernism. Therefore, "[McDonagh's] West is no longer the fable land of whimsical gaiety and firm belief."[15] "The rural, domestic settings characteristic of McDonagh's work align him with Synge although McDonagh's vision of these settings is darker and more pessimistic. McDonagh's emphasis on the more brutal undertones of everyday life is reminiscent of O'Casey."[16]

In Chapter One, I will explore Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* by using Bakhtin's theory of grotesque. I will show how Synge uses the grotesque to challenge idealized images of women. I will examine the relationship between this play's two main female characters by using the Freud's theory of the Oedipal conflict. Synge's female characters are not idealized female figures such as devoted mothers or submissive virgins. Synge characterizes the women in the world of his play as violent and sexual beings at a time when the chastity and purity of Irish womanhood had become a national myth.[17] While Stage Irishwomen are constructed to represent particular ideals of femininity, Synge's female characters are notable for their grotesqueness. They long for murderers to satisfy their need for sensation. As well,

although Widow Quin is not the real mother of Pegeen, Synge creates a Freudian hostile "mother-daughter" relationship between them when they fight over Christy, the "playboy" referred to in the play's title. This play's main plot involves Christy's challenge against his father, but Pegeen's story parallels Christy's, for she confronts her need to resolve her relationship with her mother figure. Synge also presents the process of Pegeen's transformation through her relationship with Christy and with Widow Quin.

In Chapter Two, I will show how O'Casey uses realism in order to represent the social and cultural oppression of Irish women. O'Casey defies the fantasy of the perfect mother through his realistic portrayal of Juno. I will approach this play's mother-daughter relationship by using Chodorow's theory of the individuation process of daughters as they try to define themselves against their mothers. O'Casey's female characters sharply contrast with Cathleen ni Houlihan, an abstract figure embodying national idealism. O'Casey also deconstructs idealized female symbols which constrain the female body for the benefits of patriarchy. On the one hand, he uses the names of a Roman goddess, Juno, and of the Virgin Mary, respectively, for his two main female characters. On the other hand, he reveals that his tenement women are completely different from iconic images of femininity, such as those of the Great Mother or the Virgin. Instead of glorifying women, he presents realistic female characters, revealing the harsh predicament of tenement women. Juno's failure to fulfill her role as a "perfect" mother challenges idealized mothers in previous Irish drama. Moreover, her daughter, Mary, is another revolutionary female character. In

*Juno*, O'Casey anticipates McDonagh's *Beauty Queen* by including the mother-daughter relationship in the plot.

In Chapter Three, I will examine McDonagh's female characters and their mother-daughter relationship by using Kristeva's theory of abjection. Existing only as a form of abjection, the grotesque loses its regenerating power in McDonagh's dramatic world. The mother-daughter relationship has only destructive results for women: the mother is an abusive controller and the daughter is a murderer. McDonagh's female characters are more violent and desperate than those of his predecessors. In *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, McDonagh depicts desperate female characters in rural Ireland. A mother and a daughter are driven to self-destruction in their isolated surroundings and their over-dependence on each other. McDonagh parodies the literary idealization of Irish women as "Old Mother Ireland" and "Young Virgin". The Mother Ireland figure is transformed into a selfish and dominating mother, a monstrous hag, and the Young Virgin is presented as a hysterical middle-aged spinster. Their over-dependence on each other leads inevitably to the play's shocking conclusion.

As James Connolly states, Irish women have been suffering under the double yoke of colonialism and patriarchy (cited in Quinn 49). My main project here is to examine three canonical Irish plays by J.M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, and Martin McDonagh, respectively, from a feminist perspective in order to show how these male playwrights have tried to give their female characters a new voice in Irish drama.

[1] Stage Irishman was "at heart a rowdy and exuberant clown [...] he filled the theatre with as much laughter as sentimentality and was most successful in his rollicking 'Oirish' comedies. The Stage Irishman who for centuries had been passed off as the brash buffoon of English literature" (58) David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1960). See also G.C. Duggan, The Stage Irishman (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969)

[2] I use the term "Stage Irishwoman" to refer to the Irish cultural representation of women, who are heroic Cathleen ni Houlihan figures or idealized female figures who are gentle, passive, and beautiful young virgins. Women are also romanticized as great mothers or pure virgins. Irish nationalists embraced Victorian middle-class morality in their fantasy of a pure Celtic Ireland, which simultaneously idealized and repressed women (40). See Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha Ó Corráin, ed. Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension (CT: Greenwood P, 1979).

[3] Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, introduction. Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland, ed. Anthony Bradley and Maryman Gialanella Valiulis (Massachusetts: U of Massachusetts P, 1997) 6.

[4] Cathleen ni Houlihan, produced in 1902, was co-authored by W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory. It provides an example of a powerful female image created for nationalistic purposes. *Cathleen ni Houlihan* presents a female symbolizing captive Ireland seeking a male protector who is ready to sacrifice himself for her. It is set at the time of the French landing in 1798. In this play, Cathleen, a poor old woman, visits the Gillane family on the day before the marriage of the family's first son. She laments the loss of her beautiful green fields to strangers, symbolizing the colonization of Ireland by England. As the son follows Cathleen to fight for Ireland, leaving his bride, Cathleen is transformed into a beautiful young girl with the walk of a queen. The transformation of the poor old woman propagates the belief that the Irish people's sacrifice is worthwhile.

[5] Antoinette Quinn, "Cathleen ni Houlihan Writes Back: Maud Gonne and Irish National Theater," Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland, ed. Anthony Bradley and Maryman Gialanella Valiulis (Massachusetts: U of Massachusetts P, 1997) 44. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[6] J.M. Synge, The Playboy of the Western World, Plays and Poems of J.M. Synge, ed. T.R. Henn (London: Methuen, 1963).

[7] Sean O'Casey, Juno and the Paycock, Three Plays (London: Pan, 1980).

[8] Martin McDonagh, The Beauty Queen of Leenaen, The Beauty Queen of Leenane and other plays (New York: Vintage, 1998).

[9] D.E.S. Maxwell, A Critical History of Modern Irish Drama 1891-1980 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 54.

[10] Peter Kavanagh, The Story of the Abbey Theatre (New York: Devin-Adair, 1950) 56. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[11] W.B. Yeats, "J.M.Synge and the Ireland of His Time," Twentieth Century Interpretation of The Playboy of the Western World, ed. Thomas R. Whitaker (Englewood, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1969) 32.

[12] Christopher Murray, Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997) 64.

[13] B.L. Smith, O'Casey's Satiric Vision (Kent, OH: Kent UP, 1978) 5.

[14] Fintan O'Toole, "Shadows over Ireland" American Theater July-Aug. 1998. March 2004 http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=798095&db=aph

[15] Joseph Feeney, "Martin McDonagh: Dramatist of the West," Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review 87.345 (1998) 26.

[16] Heath Deihl, "Classic Realism, Irish Nationalism, and a New Breed of Angry Young Man in Martin McDonagh," Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association 34.2 (2001) 103.

[17] T.R. Henn, introduction. The Plays and Poems of J.M. Synge (London: Methuen, 1963) 61.

## Chapter 1: Grotesque Women in *The Playboy of the Western World*

"I never killed my father. I'd be afeard to do that, except I was the like of yourself with blind rages tearing me within, for I'm thinking you should have had great tussling when the end was come."

Pegeen in *The Playboy of the Western World* (187)

John Millington Synge was born on April 16, 1871, in Rathfarnham, a Dublin suburb, and died on March 24, 1909, in Dublin. The youngest of eight children, Synge was of Anglo-Irish ancestors. Although he grew up in a religious Protestant family, Synge later rejected the parochial viewpoints of religion and became fascinated with Irish mythology and Celtic culture. The grotesque elements in Synge's drama spring from his intimacy with medieval literature and his encounter with the west of Ireland. His grotesque world initially caused much controversy among Dublin audiences for his drama follows "the maledictive tradition of the medieval Irish poets."[1] I will discuss the literary influences upon Synge's style in order to provide a general understanding of his grotesque dramatic world and its characters. *The Playboy of the Western World*, which evoked notorious riots, uses grotesque imagery to present its characters. To analyze Synge's portrayal of subversive female characters, I will examine his use of the grotesque.

After Synge went to Paris to study new trends in French literature, he attended lectures on medieval literature and discovered the expressions of grotesque realism in the medieval farces and old poems and ballads, some of which he translated in his *Poems and Translations*.[2] In 1895 and 1898, respectively, he attended Professor Louis

Petit de Julleville's lectures on medieval French literature and took Professor Henry d'Arbois de Jubainville's courses, which were based on comparisons of ancient Greek and Irish cultures.[3] While exploring the growing European interest in Celtic culture, Synge met W.B. Yeats in Paris on December 21, 1896. This meeting became a turning point in Synge's career as Yeats influenced much of Synge's later literary career. A leader of current movements in Irish drama, Yeats encouraged Synge to write for the Abbey theatre.

If Synge was a genius waiting to be discovered, Yeats was the man who recognized Synge's talent, encouraging him to "go to the Aran Islands and find a life that had never been expressed in literature."[4] Along with Lady Gregory, Yeats led the formation of the Irish National Theatre Society in 1903, which developed into the Abbey Theatre after December 1904. Lady Gregory and Yeats based the Irish dramatic movement on the assumption that establishing a national theatre was the means to define and sustain a national consciousness. Yeats' perception of an Irish national theatre differed from the assumptions of European Naturalistic theatre. Although he acknowledged Ibsen as a great dramatist, Yeats found Ibsen's drama "insufficiently poetic for [Yeats'] idea of a national theatre."[5] Like Yeats, Synge also disagreed with the joyless realism of modern drama, declaiming in the Preface to *The Playboy of the Western World* "On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed."[6] However, Synge and Yeats differed in their politics. Whereas Lady Gregory and Yeats sought to produce national emancipation from a national theatre, Synge maintained an ironic and detached attitude in his works. Departing from the trend of idealizing the west of

Ireland, Synge was concerned with "[the] excited yet dispassionate exploration of the world of the western peasantry."[7]

Synge visited the Aran Islands four times between 1898 and 1902, finding a culture largely untouched by modern civilization.[8] He was impressed by the primitiveness and refined beauty of the Aran Islands.[9] Though he was enamoured with the islands, Synge was also conscious of the harsh realities confronting the islanders in their daily lives. In *In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara*,[10] Synge used his knowledge of the Aran Islands to analyze the social conditions in the west, investigating the causes of poverty in the distressed countryside (Bourgeois 86). Although the west of Ireland had provided a national myth of nobility for the Irish nationalist movement, Synge's experience with the reality of rural Ireland revealed to him an appalling poverty that was far from the romanticized images.[11] Synge's reversal of the romanticized representation of the west was controversial for Dublin audiences, who reacted with hostility to most of his plays including *The Shadow of Glen*, *The Tinkers Wedding*, *The Well of the Saints* and *The Playboy of the Western World*. Though Synge detested realism and naturalism, he tried to convey in his works elements of the reality of the west of Ireland. Synge created this reality by incorporating the locality and language of the west into his plays: "I have used one or two words only that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland, or spoken in my own nursery before I could read the newspapers" (Synge 174). What disturbed his audience was that Synge deliberately subverted reality in his carnivalesque dramatic world.[12]

Synge's wild imagination made his dramatic world seem profane and barbarous to his Irish audience. As Yeats commented, Synge loved "all that has edge, all that is salt in the mouth, all that is rough to the hand, all that heightens the emotions by contest."[13] Synge's world is the grotesque world Bakhtin explored in *Rabelais and His World.* In his theory of the carnival in literature, Bakhtin defines grotesque realism as degradation: "[Parody and] all the other forms of grotesque realism degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh."[14] Bakhtin opposes grotesque realism to "all the forms of medieval high art and literature" (Bakhtin 20). Presenting grotesque bodily elements in his plays, Synge depicted many of his female characters grotesquely. Synge's use of the grotesque is in keeping with Rabelaisian degradation: "the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract" (Bakhtin 19). His grotesque representations of women were seen as insults to the womanhood of Ireland during a time when Irish national leaders were trying to establish images of Romantic Ireland and pure and chaste Irish women.[15]

From the beginning, Synge's female characters were controversial for an audience who expected "another 'Celtic' drama in the Yeatsian tradition."[16] When his earliest play, *The Shadow of the Glen,* was produced in 1903, Synge was accused of falsely representing Irish womanhood, and his later works received the same angry criticism. An editor of *The United Irishman*, Arthur Griffith, criticized Synge's first play as "a staging of a corrupt version of that old world libel on womankind—the 'Widow of Ephesus'" (quoted in Green 148).[17] Mrs. Gonne-MacBride[18] resigned from the Irish National Theatre in protest against the play, and some nationalist critics denied that an Irish woman's illicit relationship could happen as it is depicted in the

play (Bourgeois 158). The accusations against Synge's female characterization culminated when *The Playboy of the Western World* was produced. It caused notorious riots[19] in Dublin in 1907 and in New York and Philadelphia during the winter of 1911-12. Although audiences had many reasons for criticizing *The Playboy of the Western World*, people were most disturbed by Synge's unconventional female characters.

Audiences expecting to see Yeatsian heroic characters in the Irish legendary and mythic tradition were instead presented with characters interacting in a Rabelaisian world. The women in *The Playboy of the Western World* exhibit a grotesqueness that subverts patriarchy by defying its limited representation of female images. The unconventional female characters mock patriarchal authority by exposing the failings of their menfolk. Two characters in particular demonstrate the subversive nature of Synge's characterization: Widow Quin and Pegeen Mike. Their relationship contains elements of the grotesque as well as a carnivalesque inversion of the mother-daughter Oedipal conflict. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how such elements challenge idealized representations of the female as submissive and docile, and give the women a control over their actions that is absent from traditional dramatic representations of Irish women.

Elements of the carnivalesque are present from the opening of *The Playboy of the Western World*.[20] Concerns about life and death are expressed in the form of the upcoming marriage of the young couple Pegeen Mike and Shawn Keogh, and the wake for Kate Cassidy. With their daily excessive drinking and love of violence, the villagers exhibit the grotesque rigidity of behaviour that Bergson associated with the

laughter that arises when we observe "something mechanical encrusted [up]on the living."[21] Bergson explains, "[the comic] came from the fact that the living body became rigid, like a machine" (Bergson 49). When the villagers habitually go drinking and indulge in telling grotesque stories, their sensational thirst for life appears mechanical. The villagers participate in their comic villainy with the automatism of Bergsonian fools. Such characters are only laughed at, unlike "wise buffoons or clowns primarily endowed with a flexibility of instinctive wit" or humour (Krause 49). However, with the arrival of the father killer, Christy, a subversive carnival starts in Mayo. During the Bakhtinian carnival, laughter is experienced as a festive laughter. Carnival laughter differs from satiric laughter because the former "is also directed at those who laugh" (Bakhtin 12). Through carnival laughter, people are liberated from social conventions: "Laughter liberates from the fear [. . .] of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power" (94). In the carnival world of *The Playboy of the Western World*, the villagers enjoy liberating festive laughter, but only during Christy's visit.

As the play opens, Pegeen, "*a wild looking but fine girl*", is writing a letter to prepare for her own wedding (176). Compared with the other villagers, she is financially secure; her father, Michael James, owns a country public house. Having little choice, Pegeen is engaged to her cousin, the rich farmer Shawn Keogh. They are awaiting Father Reilly's dispensation from the bishop in order to get married. Pegeen, however, is not eagerly anticipating her marriage to Shawn, preferring men such as Daneen Sullivan who "knocked the eye from a peeler" or Marcus Quin, who "got six months for maiming ewes, and he a great warrant to tell stories of holy Ireland till

he'd have the old women shedding down tears about their feet" (177). Shawn reveals his cowardice when he is asked to stay the night with Pegeen so that the others can go to Kate Cassidy's wake. Shawn, afraid of what Father Reilly will think of him, runs away from Michael's shebeen only to return immediately, afraid of "the queer dying fellow" in a ditch (180). As everyone watches the door with curiosity, Christy Mahon, "*a slight young man*" who looks "*very tired and frightened and dirty*" (180), enters the house.

The people start interrogating Christy with delighted curiosity. In their interrogation, they expose all kinds of crimes, from trivial misbehavior, such as stealing, to a political act, such as fighting for the Boers. At last, Pegeen's threats make Christy confess his crime of killing his father. When the villagers perceive that Christy has committed patricide, the carnival begins. Perceiving Christy as a potboy [22] of the house, Pegeen starts a romance with him. Widow Quin interrupts the relationship, and the competition starts over Christy. Although the other girls are fascinated with Christy's story, Pegeen wins Christy's love. The carnival culminates when Christy wins the sports games. However, the festivity ends with the arrival of Christy's father, Mahon. Christy is betrayed when the villagers turn against him, but the worst betrayal comes from Pegeen, who rejects him when he tries to actually kill his father in front of the villagers.

As the carnival begins in Mayo, the community's hierarchical ranks are suspended, and the participants are liberated from social prohibitions. According to Bakhtin, "one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all

hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin 10). As a father killer, Christy symbolizes the carnival spirit, which mocks all authorities, especially patriarchy. However, the female characters' grotesque bodies give Synge's play the full-fledged carnival spirit.

Synge's grotesque female characters create the most striking images in *Playboy*. In the play's subversive carnival world, the female characters are liberated from the social conventions of patriarchy. With their obsessive fascination with both sex and violence, these characters have the kind of grotesque bodies that Bakhtin found in Rabelais. The village girls provide disturbing images of the grotesque. In order to see the father killer, they throng to Michael's public house in the early morning, bringing gifts to Christy. However, the most fully realized portrait of female grotesqueness is that of Widow Quin. Resembling an old hag, she engages in competition with the young virgin Pegeen over who will wed Christy.

The villagers' fascination with violence, which dominates their dialogue, is another aspect of the play's grotesque carnival world. Grotesque stories of hanging, madness, and murder are the subjects of daily conversation for the villagers.[23] The horrible crime of patricide delights them, and they start questioning how Christy killed his father. Peegen, fascinated with Christy's crime, most actively attempts to equate his image with that of a playboy. When Christy enters the public house, he is nearly as timid as Shawn. Once he reveals his crime of patricide, however, he is accepted as a brave man. Although Shawn thinks Christy is "a bloody-handed murderer," the other villagers admire him as "a daring fellow" (183). Pegeen imagines Christy to be a hero who "should have been living the like of king of Norway or the

eastern world" (188). For Pegeen, Christy is "an exotic alternative" to cowardly Shawn Keogh.[24] The female characters make that "heroism possible through their act of recognition": Pegeen's esteem transforms Christy from a timid man into a heroic figure.[25] Although Christy appears frightened, Pegeen sees him as "a fine, handsome young fellow with a noble brow" (186). When Pegeen identifies Christy as a king of Norway, or as one of the poets who have great rages, Christy becomes increasingly confident, and boasts, "I a seemly fellow with great strength in me and bravery of" (189). Christy's cowardice is exposed, however, when he hears a knock, and he immediately clings to Pegeen: "Oh, glory! it's late for knocking, and this last while I'm in terror of the peelers, and the walking dead" (189).

While the romance between Pegeen and Christy grows, Widow Quin, accepting the advice of Shawn and Father Reilly, asks Christy to stay in her home. The authority represented by Shawn and Father Reilly prohibits a virgin woman from being exposed to a temptation but allows a widow to stay with a man. As an outsider, Widow Quin is free from patriarchal restrictions, and therefore her sexual activities are not disturbing to the community. On the other hand, the sexuality expressed by Pegeen is "abnormal" and disturbing because she is expected to be a wife and a mother in the service of patriarchy. Playing a crucial role in Christy's transformation, Widow Quin belongs to "the world outside the tight social order" of the community.[26] Pegeen describes Widow Quin as a villainous murderess:

> PEGEEN. [...] She hit himself with a worn pick, and the rusted poison did corrode his blood the way he never overed it,

and died after. That was a sneaky kind of murder did win small glory with the boys itself. (190)

Although Widow Quin has killed her husband, the community does not accept her as a hero; rather, "all dread her here" (197). While Christy's "murder" is fantasized as heroic, Widow Quin's murder is only disturbing. Christy's deed has no real horror, but Widow Quin's murder is threatening because of its reality, having occurred within the community.

Widow Quin's crime is even more threatening because the presence of a murderer and a murderess has a different impact on society. Although Christy has killed his father, his murder means the emergence of a new patriarch. While the murdered father was "a dirty man" getting old and crusty, the son is "a daring fellow" whom even the police fear (183), and the community considers Christy an ideal substitute for an old and impotent patriarch. Conversely, Widow Quin, as a woman, cannot inherit the position of a patriarch. She has murdered a patriarch, but none of her children have survived to inherit the role. Whereas Christy, an outsider, becomes integrated into the community, Widow Quin remains an outsider, as if she is being "punished" for gaining independent power. By killing her own husband, Widow Quin has rejected the traditional female roles of a wife and mother and has therefore been cut off from social recognition.

Furthermore, Widow Quin's murderous image is associated with her explicit sexuality. She is considered a murderer although whether or not she intended to kill her husband is not clear. Her combined images of murderer and sexual temptress

make her monstrous for the villagers. For example, Pegeen accuses her of being a witch-like figure.

> PEGEEN (*with noisy scorn*). It's true the Lord God formed you to contrive indeed. Doesn't the world know you reared a black ram at your own breast, so that the Lord Bishop of Connaught felt the elements of a Christian, and he eating it after in a kidney stew? Doesn't the word know you've been seen shaving the foxy skipper from France for a threepenny-bit and a sop of grass tobacco would wring the liver from a mountain goat you'd meet leaping the hills? (191)

Just as the female body is an object of contempt and horror in Freud's theories, Widow Quin's sexuality is ridiculed grotesquely. Quoting Ferenczi, Freud compares the female genitals, devoid of a penis, to "Medusa's head."[27] Once female genitals are conceived of as a castrated Medusa's head, feelings of horror and contempt are directed toward women. Widow Quin refuses to repress her sexual desire and to be a castrated inferior body. As a widow, she is longing for "the gallant hairy fellows" sailing the sea (208). In a patriarchal society, however, Widow Quin is an object of contempt because she expresses her sexuality and refuses to meet the demands of the institutionalized family.

Without having access to power within a patriarchal society, Widow Quin is treated with contempt by the conventional Pegeen, who is waiting for marriage. If Widow Quin represents a murderous temptress, Pegeen represents the female archetype of the pure virgin. However, both women provide incongruous female

images. Pegeen's abusive manner and sexuality contradict the pure and submissive image of a virgin, just as Widow Quin's humane sympathy contradicts the typical destructive image of a temptress. Such contradictory images make both women appear grotesque and controversial.

Although the audience expects Pegeen to act as a decent woman, she is as audacious as Widow Quin. Pegeen is the first to ask that Christy be hired as a pot-boy. Rejecting Shawn's and Widow Quin's offers to stay with her at night, Pegeen chooses to spend a night with only Christy. In spite of Widow Quin's and the village girls' interests in the father killer, Pegeen's strong will enables her to gain Christy's affection. The next morning, while Pegeen is out, the girls bring eggs, a piece of cake, and chicken to Christy. Praising him, they make Widow Quin and Christy link arms and toast one another. When Pegeen returns, she drives the women away by treating them abusively. She also manipulates Christy into not flirting with the other women again by telling him that they may tell his story to police. Pegeen also uses a newspaper's description of a man's hanging to frighten Christy.

Christy and Pegeen are both burdened with their upcoming arranged marriages. Pegeen considers Christy's patricide an act of achieving independence from the patriarchal authority that she also wishes to be free from. After hearing Christy's story, Pegeen can articulate her hidden wish to be free from authority. In her first romantic scene with Christy, she reveals her longing to achieve independence: "I never killed my father. I'd be afeard to do that, except I was the like of yourself with blind rages tearing me within" (187). Pegeen admires Christy for killing his father and wants to gain the same kind of freedom for herself. While Christy becomes a true

playboy, Pegeen is also transformed in the course of the action (Finney 89). In the carnival spirit, language and role-playing make this transformation possible. Once Christy starts telling his story of killing his father, the townspeople begin to respect him. The power of his story makes Pegeen associate him with fine and fiery poets who have great rages. After being described as a poet and hero, Christy starts to use poetic rhythms and metaphors. In accordance with his transformation, Pegeen adopts poetic language as well. Just as Pegeen's fantasies of Christy transform his behavior, Christy's images of Pegeen facilitate her transformation. Although Pegeen smells like "a stale stink of poteen" from selling it in her shop (208), Christy imagines Pegeen to be "a lovely, handsome woman" whose sweet voice all men want to hear (200). Pegeen's language borders on the grotesque when she threatens Christy and later insults Widow Quin. As the romance with Christy develops, however, Pegeen uses beautiful language, so much so that she is surprised at her transformation: "And to think it's me is talking sweetly, Christy Mahon, and I the fright of seven townlands for my biting tongue" (219).

In the same way that a Lacanian baby misidentifies reflected images as real,[28] Christy and Pegeen assume mirror images to construct their new identities, and the power of language makes the transformation possible. As Pegeen becomes autonomous, her speech becomes full of beautiful poetic metaphors. Just as Pegeen transforms Christy into a playboy, his influence helps her to become independent of her father's authority. Through her romance with Christy, she becomes independent enough to be able to choose her future husband. Considering Christy's murder of his

father as proof of his attainment of self-confidence, Pegeen takes him as "an ideal alter ego" (Finney 89).

Christy's rebellion against his father suggests an Oedipal conflict with an ironic reversal. Mahon orders Christy to marry Widow Casey only for his own benefit. Although Widow Casey suckled Christy for six weeks after he was born, and she was a foster mother to him, Mahon attempts to force Christy to marry her so that he can have "her hut to live in and her gold to drink" (196). Widow Casey is a grotesque old hag:

> CHRISTY. A walking terror from beyond the hills, and she two score and five years, and two hundred-weights and five pounds in the weighting scales, with a limping leg on her, and a blinded eye, and she a woman of noted misbehaviour with the old and young. (196)

In a parody of the Oedipal conflict, Christy tries to kill his father in order not to have to sleep with his (foster) mother. According to Freudian theory, a fear of castration encourages the male child not to compete with his father for sexual possession of the mother, and instead, to postpone his sexual desires until the future.[29] In contrast, Christy's fear of sexually possessing his mother makes him rebel against his father's authority. While running away from the Widow Casey, Christy is confronted by Widow Quin, who is an attractively disguised version of the old hag Widow Casey (Grene 95). While Widow Casey's ugliness makes her "a walking terror," Widow Quin's violence and explicit sexuality also make her grotesque (196). Just as Widow Casey fed Christy with her breasts when he was a baby, Widow Quin feeds him with

her admiration and protects him from his resurrected father and, later, the angry villagers. As a mother figure to Christy, Widow Quin helps Christy to be independent and to gain a critical sense of self.

The very fact that Pegeen has no mother to relate to emphasizes the lack of a positive bond between a mother and a daughter in Synge's play. Although Widow Quin is older than Pegeen, they are pitted against each other in the battle for Christy. In her competition with Widow Quin, Pegeen enacts a version of a female Oedipal conflict. When Widow Quin tries to take Christy to her home, Pegeen eagerly defends him against the widow. The competition between the two women escalates until Widow Quin finally gives Christy up. Exchanging hatred and insults, Widow Quin and Pegeen suggest a Freudian competitive mother-and-daughter relationship. According to Freud, after realizing they are already castrated like their mothers, girls reject their mothers as initial love objects and instead transfer their desires to their fathers (Weedon 46). As a result, daughters have to compete with their mothers to get affection from their fathers and, indeed, from all men. In this situation, Pegeen is still the virginal daughter who has the upper hand in the competition; her admiration for Christy's story has made her his favorite. However, Freud's model of female Oedipal conflict is subverted as a mother figure Widow Quin willingly gives up her competition with her daughter.

In act two, Widow Quin appears with Shawn in order to persuade Christy to give up Pegeen. Shawn tries to bribe Christy with a new hat, breeches, coat, and a ticket to the Western States. However, Christy insists on staying with Pegeen, and Widow Quin tries a new tactic, asking Shawn to give her a red cow, a mountain ram,

the right of way across his rye path, a load of dung, and turbary upon the western hill in exchange for marrying Christy (204). Christy, however, is arrogant about his new appearance now that he is wearing Shawn's clothes, and he consequently rejects Widow Quin's offer of marriage, bragging about his new position:

> CHRISTY. From this out I'll have no want of company when all sorts is bringing me their food and clothing [...] the way they'd set their eyes upon a gallant orphan cleft his father with one blow to the breeches belt. (204)

Despite his swaggering, Christy still needs protection. The cowardly Christy hides behind a door when Christy's father Mahon, who has been looking for Christy for ten days to "destroy him for breaking the head on [Mahon] with the clout of a loy" (205), arrives. Mahon proudly shows Widow Quin his injury on his head: "*he takes off a big hat, and shows his head in a mass of bandages and plaster, with some pride*" (205). Although the arrival of old Mahon alerts Widow Quin to Christy's lies, she saves Christy by telling Mahon that Christy has left to "catch a coasting steamer to the north or south" (207). When she realizes Christy is really in love with Pegeen, however, Widow Quin withdraws from the competition with Pegeen. Widow Quin's sense of reality makes her practical so that she agrees to help Christy marry Pegeen on the condition that he give her "a mountainy ram, and a load of dung at Michaelmas" (209). Although she makes a bargain with Christy, Widow Quin tries to protect him. From this moment, Widow Quin plays the role of mother rather than temptress.

In act three, the villagers' sports games become the climax of the carnival. After "winning all in the sports below, racing, lepping, dancing" (210), Christy proves

himself to be the carnival king. The festival mood culminates in the mule race. As "*a great burst of cheering*" is heard from outside, the characters watch the game from the window in the public house and are excited by Christy's victory (213). However, Mahon returns to the town and recognizes Christy after watching the game: "It's Christy, by the stars of God! I'd know his way of spitting and he astride the moon" (215). In order to protect Christy, Widow Quin convinces Jimmy and Philly that Mahon is a raving maniac who is not to be believed. Widow Quin manipulates Mahon into believing him to be mad, by emphasizing the contradictory images between Christy's former image as "a fool of men" and his new status as "the champion Playboy of the Western World" (213). Although Mahon sees the playboy as his son, Christy's unbelievable changes make Mahon doubt his sanity. Mahon accepts his own new identity as a maniac, even boasting about his past experience of madness: "I a terrible and fearful case, the way that there I was one time, screeching in a straightened waistcoat, with seven doctors writing out my saying in a printed book" (216). Widow Quin's protection plays a crucial role in helping Christy to become "the wonder of the western world" (215). As an old hag, she is the closest of all the characters to understanding the playboy's vision of liberation from social oppression. Widow Quin's willingness to give up Christy to Pegeen signals a departure from the traditional Freudian Oedipal competition between women. Widow Quin, who has broken from patriarchal rule by killing her husband and defying the narrow rules of the village, is the only person who can understand Christy and help him to become a playboy.

As the romance between Christy and Pegeen begins to blossom, Pegeen

almost achieves autonomy from her father's authority. When Christy and Pegeen express their love with beautiful words, Michael James appears with Shawn and announces that Father Reilly has obtained a dispensation to allow Shawn to marry Pegeen. This time, Pegeen rejects her father's decision because she prefers Christy to "the like of Shaneen, and he a middling kind of a scarecrow, with no savagery or fine words in him at all" (220). She announces to her father she will marry Christy: "it's that lad, Christy Mahon, that I'm wedding now" (220). However, when Mahon reappears, Pegeen turns her back on Christy. Christy almost succeeds in transforming his fantasy into reality, but with the appearance of Mahon, the reality of his heroic deeds turns out to be only "a soft blow" (223). Because Pegeen cannot face the banality of the real situation, Christy is reduced to being "a Muster liar":

> CHRISTY (*piteously*). You've seen my doings this day, and let you save me from the old man; for why would you be in such a scorch of haste to spur me to destruction now?
>
> PEGEEN. It's there your treachery is spurring me, till I'm hard set to think you're the one I'm after lacing in my heart-strings half an hour gone by. *(To Mahon)*. Take him on from this, for I think bad the world should see me raging for a Munster liar, and the fool of men. (223)

Frustrated, Christy tries to make the story come true by attempting patricide once more, but the sight of the actual deed upsets the villagers. When they turn against Christy, Widow Quin fights to save him from his final destruction, even offering him other girls. Christy declines her offer, still believing that his attempted murder will

prove his heroic identity to Pegeen. The horrific violence lacks the transforming power of the imagination, and therefore Christy is only branded a criminal. Pegeen is Christy's worst betrayer as she denies her love for him and leads the others in torturing him by binding him with a rope and burning his leg with a sod. Trying, in effect, to maim him like an animal, Pegeen is guilty of the most grotesquely cruel act in the play. Her betrayal, in fact, allows Christy to transform into a playboy because he recognizes that the villagers are careless about reality, than about fantasies of heroic deeds.

At the moment when the staged violence culminates with Christy's torture, Mahon returns. Ironically, Christy's father saves him from being sacrificed as the king of a carnival that has run its course. Christy twice fails to kill his father with actual blows, but finally succeeds in symbolically murdering him with words.[30] As Mahon frees him from the rope, Christy asserts that he will be the master of his father:

> MAHON. [...] but my son and myself will be going our own way, and we'll have great times from this out telling stories of the villainy of Mayo, and the fools is here. (*To Christy, who is freed*) Come on now.
>
> CHRISTY. Go with you, is it? I will then, like a gallant captain with his heathen slave. Go on now and I'll see you from this day stewing my oatmeal and washing my spuds, for I'm master of all fights from now. (*pushing Mahon*) Go on, I'm saying.
>
> MAHON. Is it me?
>
> CHRISTY. Not a word out of you. Go on from this.

MAHON. (*walking out and looking back at Christy over his shoulder*)

Glory be to God! (*with a broad smile*) I am crazy again.

Once Christy asserts his mastership with his words, he actually takes over control of his father. With his final victory, Christy turns into a playboy who will "go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the Judgment Day" (229). As Christy leaves the village of fools, the carnival ends, and the villagers go back to their normal habits without any remorse: "By the will of God, we'll have peace now for our drinks" (229). At the moment when Christy and his father actually leave, however, Pegeen is left behind, and she realizes that she has chosen a bleak reality.

Pegeen realizes that she has expelled a real playboy from her village, and that the Mayo community has returned to its earlier submission to the oppressive patriarchal model sanctioned by the community's authoritarian and patriarchal Church. Pegeen must accept her fate as a wife and mother in the conventional society by marrying Shawn. Pegeen's last lamentation reveals that her loss of Christy has left her in a worse situation than she was in before: "Oh, my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World" (229). While Christy is transformed into a playboy and walks away from the village, Pegeen remains trapped in her relationship with Shawn, who is excited about their future marriage: "it's a miracle Father Reilly can wed us in the end of all, and we'll have none to trouble us when his vicious bite is healed" (229). In the end, as a daughter, Pegeen can't achieve individuation, whereas Christy is transformed into "a master of all fights" who has a lifetime of "romancing" ahead of him (229).

In *The Playboy of the Western World*, Synge portrays grotesque female characters liberated from Ireland's cultural restrictions. When these female characters actively participate in carnival festivities, they reveal their bodily needs. Widow Quin, a known murderess who openly expresses her need for sex, is a model of grotesqueness. Pegeen's grotesque abusiveness makes her a would-be murderess. Such grotesque characterization is liberating because it defies the idealized images of women and opens the possibility for demonstrating women's desires. When the two female characters compete to get Christy's love, they simulate the kind of Oedipal conflict that arises between a mother and daughter over a male figure. However, Synge turns the deadly competition into a festive one by having the so-called mother figure, Widow Quin, back out in favor of Pegeen. Sadly, even with Widow Quin's help, Pegeen is not able to achieve her independence from her father and her patriarchal society.

Pegeen's failure to shake off her patriarchal dependency and achieve individuation and independence by standing by Christy when the villagers turn against him means that she gets left behind in every way. Pegeen's preference for fantasy over reality results in her losing the chance to transform herself. Although she allows Christy to become a playboy, the young beautiful virgin cannot become a playgirl of the western world. Further, no new solidarity has developed between Pegeen and her surrogate mother Widow Quin, so that when the play ends, only their bitter enmity has been brought to fruition. As the playboy walks away triumphantly, Ireland remains in the hands of cowards, and women reside in their conventional world. Synge's liberating carnival world allows two archetypal female figures, the mother,

Widow Quin, and the young virgin, Pegeen, to discard their conventional female social roles. However, the liberating grotesque world of the female characters disappears when Christy leaves. The female characters permanently remain trapped in patriarchal rules once the carnival ends.

[1] David Krause, The Profane Book of Irish Comedy (London: Cornell UP, 1982) 35. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[2] Maurice Bourgeois, John Millington Synge and The Irish Theatre (London: Constable, 1913) 53. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[3] Toni O'Brien Johnson, Synge: The Medieval and The Grotesque (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1982) 7.

[4] William Butler Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1961) 343.

[5] J.L. Styan, Modern Drama in Theory and Practice (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981) 92.

[6] J.M. Synge, preface, Playboy of the Western World, Henn, 175.

[7] T. R. Henn, introduction, Plays and Poems of J.M. Synge, by J.M. Synge, ed. T.R. Henn (London:Methuen, 1963) 6.

[8] J.M. Synge, The Aran Islands, J.M. Synge: Collected Works Prose, 2 vols. ed. Alan Price (London: Oxford UP, 1966) 66. Synge describes the wildness of the west during his visit to the Aran Islands: "Their way of life has never been acted on by anything much more artificial than the nests and burrows of the creatures that live round them, and they seem in a certain sense to approach more nearly to the finer types of our aristocracies—who are bred artificially to a natural ideal—than to the labourer or citizen, as the wild horse resembles the thoroughbred rather than the hack or cart-horse. Tribes of the same natural development are, perhaps, frequent in half-civilised countries, but here a touch of the refinement of old societies is blended, with singular effect, among the qualities of the wild animal".

[9] Alan Price, Synge and Anglo-Irish Drama (London: Methuen, 1961) 81.

[10] J.M. Synge, In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara, J.M. Synge: Collected Works Prose, 2 vols. ed. Alan Price (London: Oxford UP, 1966).

[11] José Lanters, "Playwrights of the Western World: Synge, Murphy, McDonagh," A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage, ed. Stephen Watt, Eileen Morgan, and Shakir Mustafa (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2000) 204.

[12] Edward Hirsh, "The Gallous Story and the Dirty Deed: The Two Playboys," Modern Drama 26 (1983) 86.

[13] William Butler Yeats, "J.M. Synge and the Ireland of His Time," Whitaker, 27.

[14] Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge: M.I.T., 1965) 20. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[15] T.R. Henn, "The Playboy of the Western World," Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Playboy of the Western World, ed. Thomas R. Whitaker (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969) 60.

[16] Ann Saddlemyer, introduction, J.M. Synge Collected Works by J.M. Synge, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 1982) 18.

[17] David H. Green, and Edward Stephens, J.M.Synge: 1871-1909, (New York: Macmillan, 1959) 148.

[18] Maude Gonne is famous for her role as Cathleen ni Houlihan in Yeats and Lady Gregory's co-authored *Cathleen ni Houlihan*(1902). Cathleen's transformation into "a young girl with the walk of a

queen," symbolized Ireland's struggle. During the 1890's Maud Gonne campaigned for the nationalist cause throughout England, Scotland, and the United States. She co-founded *Inghinidhe na hEireann* (Daughters of Erin), a revolutionary women's society. As vice-president of the Irish National Theatre Society, Gonne became an early member of the theatre movement started by W.B. Yeats.

[19] Playboy opened on Saturday, January 26, 1907. See David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens, "The Playboy Riots," J.M.Synge: 1871-1909, (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 238. After Christy said the word 'shifts,' the audience started hissing. Lady Gregory sent a telegram to W.B. Yeats, who was lecturing in Scotland: "Audience broke up in disorder at the word shift". The notorious riots started at the Monday performance on January 28, 1907. This time, the audience shouted to protest during the show, so that the performance was held as mere dumb show. Finally the police came to stop the disturbance.

[20] J.M.Synge, The Playboy of the Western World, Plays and Poems of J.M.Synge, ed. T.R. Henn (London: Methuen, 1963)

[21] Henri Bergson, Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1911) 48. Bergson suggested "the idea of an artificial mechanization of the human body". According to Bergson, people laugh when they see themselves as mechanistic and materialistic - his examples were the man-automaton, the puppet on strings, Jack-in-the Box, etc. Bergson saw laughter as a corrective punishment of unsocial individuals.

[22] A "potboy" is a worker in a public house or tavern who does various chores.

[23] Nicholas Grene, The Politics of Irish drama: Plays in context from Boucicault to Friel (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 94. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[24] D.E.S. Maxwell, A Critical History of Modern Irish Drama 1891-1980 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 50.

[25] Ann Saddlemyer, "Synge and the Nature of Woman," Woman in Irish Legend, Life and Literature, ed. S.F. Gallagher (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1983) 59.

[26] Gail Finney, "The 'Playgirl' of the western world: feminism, comedy, and Synge's Pegeen Mike," Themes in Drama: Women in Theatre, ed. James Redmond, vol. 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 94. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[27] Sigmund Freud, On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and other works of Sgmund Freud, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (Harmondsworth, Eng: Penguin, 1986) 311.

[28] See Jacques Lacan, Écrits, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977) 4. Lacan's human subject is created in the fissure of a radical split. The idea of the "mirror stage" indicates the first split the human subject undergoes before it learns languages during its the second split. According to Lacan, human infants pass through a stage in which an external image of the body produces a psychic response that gives rise to the mental representation of an "I". When infant sees its image reflected in a mirror, it perceives itself as an unified subject. However, its ego is formed by a fiction of unified subjectivity toward which the subject will perpetually strive throughout his or her life. Lacan says of the mirror stage,
"The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopeadic –and, lastly, to the assumption of an armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development."

[29] Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 46. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[30] Patricia Meyer Spacks, "The Making of the Playboy," Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Playboy of the Western World, ed. Thomas R. Whitaker (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969) 82.

## Chapter 2: Demystified Women in *Juno and the Paycock*

"Come, Mary, an' we'll never come back here agen. Let your father furrage for himself now; I've done all I could an' it was all no use—he'll be hopeless till the end of his days."

Juno in *Juno and the Paycock* (71)

Sean O'Casey was born in Dublin on 30 March 1880, the youngest of thirteen children in a lower-middle-class Dublin Protestant family. His father's early death left the O'Casey family to endure the kind of poverty and hardship that typify tenement life. Familiar with the Dublin slums, O'Casey was able to represent their appalling environment in his drama. He was acclaimed as "a photographic realist" for "reproducing the life and idiom of the people among whom he lived."[1] O'Casey's realism does not provide a simple copy of the Dublin tenements, but, rather, can be characterized as "a heightened realism."[2] The speech of his characters is "recognizably realistic, but nevertheless considerably richer than the speech of life" (Hogan 63). O'Casey blends the realism of the tenement environment with non-realistic elements such as extreme imagery, farcical elements, melodramatic devices and exaggerated characterization. While Synge creates carnival liberation in his drama, O'Casey's world is darker and more pessimistic. O'Casey witnessed endless violence in Ireland and its dehumanizing impact on people. *Juno and the Paycock* reflects O'Casey's insights about Ireland and presents what has betrayed it. I will first discuss O'Casey's social and political background before analyzing his anti-heroic vision. Then I will show that O'Casey's female characters are realistically represented. I will examine them to explore how O'Casey deconstructs the images of

mythical women. The process of demystification will be examined by analyzing the development of the play's two main female characters, and I will explore how these women discover their mother-daughter relationship.

As a socialist and anti-Catholic, O'Casey was able to present the inhumane living conditions in Dublin slums with critical insight. There is "nothing mythical or heroic about the back streets of Dublin" in his portrayals of them.[3] While the Abbey's intellectual supporters were mainly from the middle and upper classes, O'Casey was "a strange and angry man from the Dublin tenements."[4] He was "a realist with a cause, a passionate Dubliner writing for real Dubliners" (Styan 104). Always conscious of class issues, O'Casey passionately engaged in various socialist movements in Dublin. He was involved with the Dublin strike led by Jim Larkin in 1913. Later he served as Secretary of the Irish Citizen Army, whose purpose was to protect the strikers and labourers from the police (Krause 18). O'Casey also participated in Irish national movements from an early age. He joined the Gaelic League and taught Gaelic in Dublin slums.

However, after the Easter uprising of 1916 and the ensuing Civil War of 1922, O'Casey became disillusioned with the fanatic national idealism of his contemporaries. Thus, an anti-heroic vision of life is expressed throughout O'Casey's Dublin trilogy. Presenting Irish nationalism with irony, O'Casey explored illusions of heroism in his three Dublin plays: *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1922), *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), and *The Plough and the Stars* (1925). He represented an Ireland troubled with a history of violent fighting by referring to the Easter Rising of 1916, the retribution by the English forces of the Black-and-Tan of 1919-21, and the Civil

War of 1922-3.[5]

At the age of forty-three, O'Casey finally experienced success at the Abbey with his Dublin trilogy. Although the Abbey had turned down his earlier plays, O'Casey received an encouraging letter from Lady Gregory, telling him that his strong point was "characterization."[6] Following Lady Gregory's and Yeats's advice, O'Casey concentrated on his tenement characters. While Lady Gregory and Yeats played crucial roles in discovering his artistic genius, O'Casey's successful Dublin plays saved the Abbey from financial troubles. According to Lennox Robinson, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, and *Juno and the Paycock* prevented the Abbey Theatre from declaring bankruptcy (Krause 37). These two early works were greeted with enthusiasm. The audience's fascination with O'Casey's ironic approach might be explained by Irish political conflicts and the ensuing Civil War. When O'Casey's Dublin trilogy was staged at the Abbey, many Irish people were feeling "a chronic sense of disillusionment [because of] the disparity between a revolutionary ideal and actuality."[7]

*Juno and the Paycock*[8] is a domestic drama about the Boyle family and also reflects both the political history and national themes of Ireland. O'Casey constructs an ironic juxtaposition of human realities with the illusion of Irish Romanticism and the meaningless abstraction of politics and war.[9] Ireland's historical background in the 1920s is closely connected with the dramatic events in the life of the Boyle family. In *Juno*, O'Casey dramatizes the tragic trauma of the Civil War[10] by portraying its effects on the residents in the Dublin tenements, where the desperate poverty increases the suffering caused by the merciless political violence.

In his drama, O'Casey criticizes Ireland by interweaving his characters' tragedies with real political turmoil. He dramatizes his disillusionment with Irish heroism by exposing the empty idealism of his male characters, who are "actually or potentially destructive and life-crippling.[11] In contrast, O'Casey's female characters have humanistic values and admirable heroic qualities. At the same time, O'Casey characterizes the tenement women as having real needs instead of portraying these women as symbols of Ireland. O'Casey's tenement women are not modeled on the Cathleen ni Houlihan figure, who sends her children into bloody battles for Ireland. Whereas the heroism of people sacrificing for Ireland is idealized in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*,[12] O'Casey sees the worship of the mother- Ireland figure Cathleen ni Houlihan as leading to futile acts of heroism: "Kathleen ni Houlihan is very different now to the woman who used to play the harp an' sing 'Weep on, weep on, your hour is past', for she's a ragin' divil now."[13]

In *Juno and the Paycock*, O'Casey deconstructs another symbol of the motherland, the Stage Irishwoman, who is modeled on the idealized submissive virgin.[14] No longer symbols of Irish purity, O'Casey's tenement women are "earthy, shrewd, laughing, suffering, brawling, independent women" (Krause 74). In this chapter, I will offer a close reading of *Juno and the Paycock* to demonstrate how O'Casey demystifies his female characters as part of his project to destroy illusions about the endless fighting for the Irish cause. I will begin by summarising the main plot developments in order to show how the false promises of a better life for the Boyle family parallel the tragic betrayal of Irish hopes for a united country. I will then show how O'Casey presents Juno as the mainstay of her family by contrasting her

with her husband and other male characters as their fortunes rise and fall. Next, using Nancy Chodorow's theories in *The Reproduction of Mothering*,[15] I will outline how O'Casey has portrayed the attempts of Mary, Juno's daughter, to escape from falling into her mother's footsteps. My intention is to demonstrate how Juno's changing relationship with her daughter helps her to recognize exactly how trapped she really is.

Mrs. Boyle, nicknamed "Juno", takes care of her family and keeps up a pretense of solidarity, despite her impoverished reality. Hindering the family further, her husband Boyle brings his drinking buddy Joxer home whenever doing so can escape Juno's notice. The Boyles have two grown-up children, but neither of them is working: their daughter Mary is on strike from work and son Johnny is disabled as a result of his political involvement in the Easter Rising. However, news of an inheritance from Boyle's relative seems to end the Boyles' struggle with poverty. At the end of act one, Charles Bentham, a teacher and aspiring solicitor, brings the news. Upon hearing the news of his inheritance, Boyle acts like a middle-class patriarch, and the Boyle family throws a party with their neighbours, Joxer and Mrs. Madigan. Mary begins to date Bentham. In act three, the Boyle family suffers from Mary's unexpected pregnancy, an "inheritance" that provides them with no money, and the death of Johnny. After realizing that he made out the relative's will incorrectly, Bentham flees to England. Boyle goes off to a pub with Joxer, and when Johnny is left alone, he is taken out and shot by the Republicans for betraying Robbie Tancred to the Free-Staters. Nothing has changed for the better. The fate of the Boyle family echoes the failure of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the ensuing Civil War. O'Casey

portrays an Ireland betrayed by its own countrymen.

Set against the failed male characters, the hardworking Juno struggles to keep her family together. Boyle explains why he created a goddess image for his wife: "Juno was born an' christened in June; I met her in June; we were married in June, an' Johnny was born in June, so wan day I says to her, 'You should ha' been called Juno,' an' the name stuck to her ever since" (27). However, her nickname, "Juno," recalls the Roman goddess Juno[16] and symbolizes her role as a mythic figure in her family. After she assumes all her family's responsibilities, Boyle, as her "peacock," can justify doing nothing. Struggling to protect her family, Juno suffers in her goddess role: "Amn't I nicely handicapped with the whole o' yous! I don't know what any o' yous ud do without your ma" (9). She is a victim of her virtue when she ignores that her efforts, even with her sacrificial dedication, will not make anything better. During her development, she learns how to give up her mythic-goddess role.

O'Casey's first stage direction describing her underlies "*were circumstances favourable, she would probably be a handsome, active and clever woman*" (6). Her exhausted appearance reveals the difficulty of supporting her family in their poverty. She has "*a look of listless monotony and harassed anxiety, blending with an expression of mechanical resistance*" (6). Juno's financial ability to support her family makes her a dominant figure in the tenement's proletarian environment. As the breadwinner in her family, she does not hesitate to criticize her husband for his irresponsibility: "Your poor wife slavin' to keep the bit in your mouth, an' you gallivantin' about all the day like a paycock!" (14). Juno does not welcome Joxer Daily; she is worried that Boyle and Joxer will "burn all the coal an' dhrink all the tea

in the place" (7). She is shrewd enough to prevent Joxer from staying at her home. On hearing Boyle's and Joxer's voices, she hides herself to see if Boyle will bring Joxer to her home.

Jerry Devine, a labour leader, brings news of a job offer from Father Farrell, and now Boyle has a chance to work as a construction worker. Although Boyle feigns knee pain to avoid working, Juno forces him to take the job. Juno's peacock-figure, Boyle, is unemployed, spending the family money on his heavy drinking: "He wore out the Health Insurance long ago, he's after wearin' out the unemployment dole" (7). He is grotesquely characterized by his Stage-Irish animalistic appearance: "*his cheeks, reddish-purple, are puffed out, as if he were always repressing an almost irrepressible ejaculation*" (10). Boyle's strutting and consequential gaiety makes him appear bird-like: "*he carries himself with the upper part of his body slightly thrown back, and his stomach slightly thrust forward. His walk is a slow, consequential strut*" (10). With Joxer Daily, the play's other parasitic figure, Boyle ritually visits the local pub, indulging in alcohol and romanticizing his past career as a sea captain. Both Boyle and Joxer resemble Stage Irishmen. Flattered when he is called "captain," Boyle recalls his glamorous sailing experience. However, his story is revealed as an exaggeration when Juno says, "Everybody callin' you 'Captain', an' you only wanst on the wather, in an oul' collier from here to Liverpool, when anyboy, to listen or look at you, ud take you for a second Christo For Columbus!" (14). Furthermore, Boyle distorts reality in order to escape from any responsibility for his actions. When Juno suspects he has been at the pub with Joxer, Boyle swears that he has not been drinking. Soon after, however, Juno hears from Devine that Boyle was in a pub with

Joxer.

O'Casey's male characters represent the "Irish malady—the worship of past, romanticized heroes as a substitute for action in the present."[17] In contrast to the over-burdened Juno, Boyle dominates the stage with his farcical and caricature-like actions. When he is troubled, Boyle regrets "the whole wor's in a state o' chassis!" (18). Blaming others, Boyle does not realize that he creates chaos wherever he goes. While the Stage Irishman is a grotesque primitive created for the English audience's entertainment, Boyle is also a mouthpiece for O'Casey's irony. Boyle has a "self-preserving shrewdness" that enables him to avoid the obvious buffoonery of typical Stage Irishmen.[18] His buffoonery expresses criticism as well as self-degradation. Although he easily changes his opinion depending on his personal interests, his comment on the priesthood is insightful:

> BOYLE. Didn't they prevent the people in '47 from seizin' the corn, an 'they starvin'; didn't they down Parnell; didn't they say that hell wasn't hot enough nor eternity long enough to punish the Fenians? We don't forgot, we don't forget them things. (Joxer 22)

However, Boyle accepts social injustice in spite of his awareness of it. He shrewdly avoids his responsibilities by blaming others. By characterizing Boyle as a useless patriarch, O'Casey is showing that the "madness and chaos that reign outside the tenement are not separate from the chaos within."[19]

On the other hand, his son, Johnny, starts out as a national hero like the son who walks away to fight for Ireland in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Although he is a heroic figure, Johnny's reality belies his words. He received serious injuries to his hip from

participating in the Easter Rising and lost an arm in the fight in O'Connell Street. He suffers not only from physical injuries, but also from spiritual trauma. Hiding himself inside his room, Johnny is restless and frightened and cries for Juno's protection. Instead of acknowledging fear, however, Johnny tries to show his pride in his political cause: "I'd do it agen, ma, I'd do it agen; for a principle's a principle" (27). However, Johnny's mutilated body symbolizes the cost of the war, and his agony reveals the price that the people are paying for choosing different sides. He is one of many young idealists from the tenements who have been killed or injured while serving the cause:

> JUNO. [...] Hasn't the whole house, nearly, been massacred? There's young Dougherty's husband with his leg off; Mrs. Travers that had her son blew up be a mime in Inchegeela, in Co. Cork; Mrs. Mannin' that lost wan of her sons in an ambush a few weeks ago, an' now, poor Mrs. Tancred's only child gone west with his body made a collandher of. (47)

Still, as the second act unfolds with a temporary reversal of roles because of the news of the legacy, Boyle is given another chance to assert his position as the family patriarch. The news promises to end the misery of poverty for the Boyles, who experience a new sense of solidarity. Boyle proclaims "Johnny...Mary...you're to keep yourselves to yourselves for the future. Juno, I'm done with Joxer....I'm a new man from this out..." (30). In act two, the Boyle family improves its tenement house with new furniture and decorations: "*The same, but the furniture is more plentiful, and of a vulgar nature* [...] *cheap pictures and photos everywhere. Every available spot is ornamented with huge vases filled with artificial flowers*" (31). Boyle acts as

"a man o' money," signing documents and hosting a party (31). Unlike the first act, the second act portrays Boyle taking charge of his family and ordering Juno around. Juno and Boyle's earlier relationship is compared to a cat and mouse fight as Joxer says, "It's a terrible thing to be tied to a woman that's always grousin' [...] when the cat's away, the mice can play!" (11). Now when Boyle asks for tea with "*a commanding gesture*", Juno and Mary serve the tea (36).

Juno becomes like a traditional wife once Boyle is considered a qualified patriarch who is able to support his family financially. Although she is worried about his recent reckless spending of borrowed money, she supports him. She also tries to imitate middle-class manners and starts to differentiate her family from the rest of the tenement's residents. With her newly acquired mannerisms, Juno tries to impress Bentham. Before he arrives with the news of the legacy, Juno asks Boyle to change his 'moleskin' trousers to different ones (26). Considering Bentham "superior," Juno offers the best to him, such as the most comfortable chair. Boyle points out the absurdity of Juno's enthusiasm for Bentham: "Well, there's room for him; it's a pity there's not a brass band to play him in" (35). As Juno begins to imitate the middle-class, she becomes ashamed of her tenement neighbors. At this point, the relationship between Juno and her daughter, Mary, begins to become more important in the play. Juno, as the sole provider for her family, has been very focused on Boyle and her son up to this point.

In Mary, O'Casey created a revolutionary character modeled on the New Woman. In spite of her tenement-family background, Mary aspires to overcome the limited circumstances of tenement life and to enjoy the benefits of middle-class

culture. Mary's reading of Ibsen represents her social attitudes, but Boyle dismisses it as harmful: "Aw, [this book is] one o' Mary's; she's always readin' lately— nothin' but thrash, too. [...] The Doll's House, Ghosts, an' The Wild Duck—bucks only fit for chiselurs!" (20-1). Mary also wants to rise above her class limits by creating an image of herself as a middle-class woman. However, she is also "*degraded by her environment*" (5). Although Mary claims that a "principle's a principle," and acts upon her beliefs, her tenement environment is discouraging.

Trying to differentiate herself, Mary also attempts to break away from her primary attachment to her mother by criticizing her. Whereas Juno endures her harsh reality, Mary wants to improve hers; she is aware of social injustice and tries to challenge it. In act one, as a member of a Trade Union, Mary is on strike from her job to protect her co-worker from being victimized by her employer. Juno cannot understand Mary's decision to join the strike because she knows that Mary does not like her co-worker. With her self-education and political consciousness, Mary tries to step outside her domestic sphere and act according to her moral beliefs instead of her personal feelings.

However, Juno expects her daughter to become like herself because she experiences her daughter as "an extension or double of a mother herself" (Chodorow 109). According to Chodorow, a mother "experienc[es] her son as a definite other"(105); therefore, a son is encouraged to move out of his pre-oedipal relationship with his mother into "an oedipally toned relationship defined by its sexuality and gender distinction" (107). On the other hand, a mother does not experience her daughter as separate from herself. Mothers feel a stronger sense of oneness with their

daughters "because [mothers] are the same gender as their daughters and have been girls" (109). Thus, Juno wants Mary to behave as a working-class woman in her social actions against difficult employers. Also, when Mary is concerned with her appearance, Juno only gets annoyed. Mary's concern for appearance seems to be extravagant to Juno, who is fighting for daily survival:

> MRS. BOYLE. Ah, wear whatever ribbon you like, girl, only don't be botherin' me. I don't know what a girl on strike wants to be wearin' a ribbon round her head for, or silk stockin's on her legs either; it's wearin' them things that make the employers think they're given' yous too much money. (7)

In this case, Mary is shown trying to step outside of the domestic sphere that her mother represents. Juno's attempts to control Mary reveal "a tendency in woman toward boundary confusion and a lack of sense of separateness from the world" (Chodorow 110). In patriarchal society, according to Chodorow, the failure of the daughter to individuate constructs "the psychological preconditions for the reproduction of women's subordination to men."[20]

Mary tries to "merge herself with anyone other than her mother" in order to gain individuation from her mother (Chodorow 137). However, identifying with first Devine and then with Bentham, she is actually making herself dependent on men. While she struggles to differentiate herself from her mother, Mary is still inside patriarchy. Stating Devine's and Bentham's opinions as her own, Mary habitually quotes their ideas. When Boyle gets a new gramophone in act two, Mary uses Devine's and Bentham's words to express "her" opinion:

MARY. I don't know what you wanted a gramophone for—I know Charlie hates them; he says they're destructive of real music.

BOYLE. Destructive of music—that fella ud give you a pain in your face. All a gramophone wants is to be properly played; its thrue wondher is only felt when everythin's quiet—what a gramophone wants is dead silence!

MARY. But, father, Jerry says the same; afther all, you can only appreciate music when your ear is properly trained.

BOYLE. That's another fella ud give you a pain in your face [...]. (34-5)

With a new future on the horizon for the Boyle family, Mary begins a romantic relationship with Bentham, discarding the labour leader, Devine. Through her new relationship, Mary tries to achieve individuation from her mother and her working-class family.

Bentham appears with "*a brown coat, brown knee-breeches, grey stockings, a brown sweater, with a deep blue tie; he carries gloves and a walking-stick*" (25). His appearance indicates that he is another male peacock who puts his own interests first. Boyle doubts Bentham's real intentions towards Mary: "I suppose he thinks I'll set him up, but he's wrong shipped" (33). Bentham is ostentatious with his pseudo-philosophy. When the ignorant Juno and Boyle do not understand the meaning of "Theosophist," he tries to explain it by using more obscure words such as "Prawna" and "Yogi" (37). These words are nonsense to Juno and Boyle, so Juno dismisses "Theosophist," stating, "What a comical name!" (37). Mary chooses Bentham, not

Devine, because of her longing for a middle-class existence. She obviously now expects to marry Bentham. Mrs. Madigan comments, "Here she is to-day, goin' to be married to a young man lookin' as if he'd be fit to commensurate in any position in life it ud please God to call him!" (41). Juno also encourages Mary's new relationship; she admires Bentham for his middle- class manners and his future career as a solicitor. Supporting her daughter's relationship with Bentham, she changes her attitude about Mary's concern with her appearance. Though Juno has previously criticized Mary for wearing ribbons and silk stockings, she asks Mary to change her dress when Bentham visits the Boyles: "Go on in ower that an' dress, or Charlie'll be in on you, an' tea nor nothin'll be ready" (35). At this stage of the play, Juno's relationship with Mary reflects their new prosperity. When she was busy keeping her family from succumbing to poverty, Juno had no time for her daughter. Now, relatively free from her hard work, Juno encourages Mary's efforts at self-improvement.

The Boyles' good fortune culminates in a party that reaches its most festive mood with Juno's and Mary's singing. However, their entertainment is interrupted with Johnny's hysterical crying, which reveals that he is haunted by the death of Robbie Tancred: "I seen Robbie Tancred kneelin' down before the statue. [...] it wasn't my fault that he was done" (38-9). Tenement residents are reminded of the tragic death of Robbie Tancred once more when his funeral procession goes on the street. Mrs. Tancred's lamentation about her son's death and the funeral procession are poignant reminders of the tragic results of the Civil War. While Boyle is indifferent to the tragic death and regards it as government business: "That's the

Government's business, an' let them do what we're payin' them for doin'" (47). Instead of understanding the futility of Tancred's death, Boyle callously dismisses it as "a soldier's fate" (47). Juno demonstrates more insight: "I'd like to know how a body's not t mind these things" (47). However, Juno also says "she deserves all she got; for lately, she let the' Die-hards make an open house of th' place" (47). Even at this point by believing that only Robbie Tancred and his mother are responsible for the tragedy, Juno is still denying that everyone is a part of it. Her narrow viewpoint will be shattered only when she faces the death of Johnny.

Any high hopes for prosperity come to nothing for the Boyle family in act three. With the news that the inheritance money will not be forthcoming, tragedy befalls the Boyles. Boyle admits that the expected inheritance is nothing more than a pipe dream: "There's no money comin' to us at all—the Will's wash-out!" (62). Bentham is at the center of the family tragedy, having written a will that lacks the necessary details to change the Boyles' fortune. Like the ill-prepared will, Bentham's romance with Mary is revealed as fruitless and disappointing. Mary becomes troubled; she has "*a look of dejection, mingled with uncertain anxiety*" (51). Juno eventually gleans that Bentham has left Mary for England, and the distance between herself and her daughter becomes evident. Mary, pregnant with the absent Bentham's child, states, "It would have been useless to tell you—you wouldn't understand" (52). The crisis is a turning point in Juno's relationship with her daughter, and she staunchly defends Mary against Boyle:

> MRS. BOYLE. When she comes back say nothin' to her, Jack, or she'll leave this place.

BOYLE. Leave this place! Ay, she'll leave this place, an' quick too!

MRS. BOYLE. If Mary goes, I'll go with her. (62)

Mary's pregnancy violates the cultural ideal of female purity, and male characters representing her patriarchal society berate her for her sexuality. She is also a "victim of the betrayal and hypocrisy of Irish manhood" (Durbach 24). Bentham seduces her with his false romance and then deserts her when she is of no use to him. Boyle and Johnny criticize Mary, condemning her for disgracing their family. Boyle harshly rejects helping her, even blaming her reading: "Her an' her reading'! [...] what did th' likes of her, born in a tenement house, want with reading'?" (61). Johnny insists that she must leave: "She should be dhriven out o'th house she's brought disgrace on!" (62). Although she is distressed, Mary neither regrets her relationship with Bentham nor berates herself. When Devine comes to rebuild their relationship, Mary is brave enough to tell him the truth about her situation. Despite his claims of being "humanistic," Devine also refuses to help Mary. Despite his promise of love, Devine rejects her after hearing about her pregnancy and also condemns her: "My God, Mary, have you fallen as low as that?" (66). Mary berates him for his hypocrisy: "Your humanity is just as narrow as the humanity of the others" (67).

Mary's illicit pregnancy reveals her disregard for conventional social beliefs about women's virginity as "virtue". While her name is the same as that of the virgin mother of Jesus, Mary doesn't follow the social restrictions placed on women, and she is not a virgin. Juno, on the other hand, has been the archetype of the mother figure struggling to protect her family, like the Roman goddess of childbirth and home. When she chooses to leave her husband, her decision is "an epoch-breaking

step for Juno" because she abandons her husband for her daughter (Mitchell 70). Before she makes this step, she has to undergo another agonizing loss as Johnny is taken away and shot by the Republicans for turning in Robbie Tancred. With the news of Johnny's death, Juno acquires a more astute understanding of the public world. Previously ignorant of the social injustice that affected her family life, Juno is now able to share Mrs. Tancred's grief:

> MRS. BOYLE. Maybe I didn't feel sorry enough for Mrs. Tancred when her poor son was found as Johnny's been found now—because he was a Diehard! Ah, why didn't I remember that then he wasn't a Diehard or a Stater, but only a poor dead son! (72)

With Johnny's death, Juno understands the tragic reality of the endless betrayals and senseless violence destroying a war-torn Ireland. While her daughter laments, "my poor little child that'll have no father," Juno demonstrates her enlightenment by suggesting that her daughter's unborn baby will have "two mothers" (71). Juno encourages Mary with the promise that two mothers will be better for the baby (71). This moment presents a powerful transformation of societal norms because a family of two mothers is "an unorthodox one" without a patriarch (Mitchell 70). With her mother's encouragement, Mary is able to embrace a new hope for herself and her unborn baby. However, Juno and Mary are not "liberated". Although they walk away from Boyle, they will remain in their patriarchal society. O'Casey focuses on drunken Boyle and Joxer at the end of the play, and their strutting as dangerous peacocks are its last images. In the future, Juno and Mary will have to confront a patriarchal society peopled with other Boyle and Joxer figures.

[1] Ronald Ayling, introduction, Sean O'Casey: Modern Judgements ,ed. Ronald Ayling (London: Macmillan, 1969) 25.

[2] Robert Hogan, 'Since O'Casey' and Other Essays on Irish Drama (Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1983) 63. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[3] J.L. Styan, Modern Drama in Theory and Practice: Realism and Naturalism (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981) 104. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[4] David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1960) 41. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[5] *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1922) is set in 1920 during the guerrilla war between the Irish Republican Army and the British soldiers known as 'the Black-and-Tans'. In *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) the action takes place during a two-month period in 1922 during the Irish Civil War of 1922-3. In *The Plough and the Stars* (1925), the events happen between November 1915 and Easter 1916.

[6] Lady Gregory, "Discovering Sean O'Casey," The Sting and the Twinkle, ed. E.H. Mikhail and John O'Riordan (London: Macmillan, 1974) 18. Lady Gregory recorded O'Casey's words, which expressed his appreciation to her earlier encouragement: "He says he sent us a play four years ago, *The Frost in the Flower*, and it was returned, but marked, 'not far from being a good play.' He has sent others, and says how grateful he was to me because when we had to refuse the Labour one, *The Crimson in the Tri-colour*, I had said, 'I believe there is something in you and your strong point is characterization.'" (17-8).

[7] Nicholas Grene, The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in context from Boucicault to Friel (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 136.

[8] Sean O'Casey, Three Plays: *Juno and the Paycock, The Shadow of a Gunman, The Plough and the Stars* (London: Pan Books, 1980).

[9] Errol Durbach, "Peacocks and Mothers: Theme and Dramatic Metaphor in O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock, " Modern Drama 15 (1972) 21. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[10] In 1921, representatives of Ireland made a treaty with the British government which gave Home Rule to a newly-constituted Irish Free State. The counties of Ulster were exempt, and remained within the United Kingdom as Northern Ireland. Republican Irishmen denounced this partition of Ireland as a great betrayal. They engaged in a savage Civil War from 1922 until 1923.

[11] Ronald Ayling, "'Two Words for Women': A Reassessment of O'Casey's Heroines," Women in Irish Legend, Life and Literature, ed. S.F. Gallagher (NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1983) 91.

[12] William Butler Yeats, Kathleen ni Houlihan, Plays in Prose and Verse, written for an Irish Theatre, and generally with the help of a friend (Lodon: Macmillan, 1929).

[13] Sean O'Casey's The Shadow of a Gunman, Three Plays (London: Pan Books, 1980) 110.

[14] "Stage Irishwoman" refers to the Irish cultural representation of women, who are Cathleen ni Houlihan figures, great mothers or submissive virgins who are gentle, passive, and beautiful young virgins. Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* caused audience riots at Abbey because this play includes a prostitute character, Rosie Redmond. This incident reveals how far national idealism distorts reality.

[15] Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978). (additional

page references will be included in the text)

[16] Juno is the Roman goddess known as Hera in Greek mythology. She is the queen of the gods and the wife of Zeus, the king of the Greek gods. The peacock is Juno's favourite bird in the myth. In Aesop's Fables, the peacock appears as a beautiful but unsatisfied creature.

[17] Jack Mitchell, The Essential O'Casey: A Study of the Twelve Major Plays of Sean O'Casey (NY: International Publishers, 1980) 53. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[18] David Krause, The Profane Book of Irish Comedy (London: Cornell UP, 1982) 174.

[19] B.L. Smith, O'Casey's Satiric Vision (OH: Kent State UP, 1978) 37.

[20] Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 57.

## Chapter 3: Abject Women in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*

"I suppose now you'll never be dying. You'll be hanging on forever, just to spite me."

Maureen in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (24)

A second-generation English immigrant, Martin McDonagh was born in 1970 in London. His parents, who came from Galway in Ireland, took him to Connemara for his summer holidays so that his connection to Ireland remained strong. Indebted to his Irish origins, McDonagh constructed the dramatic world of his play *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* by using a west Ireland setting and grotesque characters. As a result, as the well-known journalist Fintan O'Toole comments, "McDonagh's plays look like a reprise of Synge; their west-of-Ireland world is obviously Synge's."[1] Moreover, McDonagh's characters speak "the poetically artificial Hiberno-English of his theatrical predecessor," J.M.Synge.[2] According to McDonagh, he bases the rhythm and the structure of his language on how his uncles spoke back in Galway: "I sort of remembered the way my uncles spoke back in Galway."[3] McDonagh's grotesque characters are reminiscent of the wild westerners in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, but his female characters are more miserable and violent women than Synge's. The carnival spirit is lost in McDonagh's version of a grotesque world, and only hatred prevails. To discuss McDonagh's dramatic world, I will explain his literary background and locate him in Irish dramatic traditions. In my discussion of McDonagh's grotesque female characterization, I will explore the abusive mother-daughter relationship that is the central concern in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*.

Adding a new dimension to Irish drama with his Leenane trilogy (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *A Skull in Connemara*, and *The Lonesome West*),[4] McDonagh surprised theater audiences as a young playwright who came "from nowhere as far as the theater world or the show business world is concerned."[5] After his Leenane trilogy, McDonagh completed his Aran trilogy, each play in this trilogy set on one of the three Aran Islands (*The Cripple of Inishmann*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, and *The Banshees of Inishmore*).[6] *The Pillowman* opened at London's National Theatre on November 13, 2003. Winning the 2004 Olivier Award for Best New Play, McDonagh confirmed his importance in contemporary drama. In his Leenane trilogy, McDonagh integrates forms of popular culture such as film and TV into his plays, creating a unique theatrical experience. McDonagh has created "the energy of contemporary popular music and independent American film" in theatre.[7] According to McDonagh, his greatest influences are filmmakers such as Martin Scorcese, Sam Peckinpah, Sergio Leone, and Quentin Tarantino and musicians such as Nirvana, The Sex Pistols, and The Pogues.[8] The presence of popular culture in McDonagh's plays is in keeping with the trend among the new playwrights who emerged in Britain in the 1990s (Price 109). McDonagh has explained his attachment to film prior to becoming a playwright: "I'm coming to theatre with a disrespect for it. I'm coming from a film fan's perspective on theatre."[9] McDonagh strives to produce a theatrical experience, different from that of the kind of theatre that bores him.[10] Indeed, McDonagh does not hesitate to present violence on stage by using a savage humor and providing surprises.

In *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*,[11] McDonagh unfolds the story of a middle-aged spinster's frustration in rural Irish society. The plot summary that follows shows

that the mother-daughter relationship is McDonagh's central concern in *Beauty Queen*. In Leenane, the rural people are troubled by their lack of opportunity, which produces a "perverse desire for sensation."[12] They are obsessed with violent cruelty or sexual stimulation, and sometimes their hunger for sensation causes them to turn against each other. The sense of deprivation and desperation is expressed by grotesque images of violence, blasphemy, and sexuality. Constantly bored, the villagers habitually use sensational topics to start their conversations. They discuss the violence of other villagers or others in the city, and they soon express their own hatred of each other. Their stories about violence become the villagers' medium for revealing their resentment. Although McDonagh follows Synge's critical approach to the representation of the west Ireland, McDonagh also deals with contemporary issues. McDonagh's characters watch reruns of Australian soaps and American movies or wait for news. The prevalence of media in the play represents the post-modern world where the simulated images replace its reality, "substituting the signs of the real for the real."[13] In the Leenane trilogy, the characters are victims of rural Ireland and the post-modern media world. "Left behind by relentless social change, these people have nothing to do but turn inwards. They have no battles to fight but an endless civil war against those they know most intimately. They are out on the cold margins of modernity."[14]

In a rural cottage in Leenane, Mag Folan lives with her daughter Maureen. Mag is a stout woman in "*her early seventies with short, tightly permed grey hair and a mouth that gapes slightly*" (3). Old and infirm, Mag wants to be taken care of by someone. This duty falls to her daughter Maureen since Mag's other two daughters

have married and left town. A forty-year-old spinster, Maureen feels that her life is consumed by taking care of her mother. In their isolation, mother and daughter have only one another to depend on. These women live in a marginalized place, without many opportunities in their lives. Maureen once went to England, trying to escape from her mother and west Ireland. However, Maureen was only frustrated by the menial work she could secure and people's treatment of her, and she returned to her mother. Because she has failed to individuate herself from her mother, Maureen is in an abusive relationship with her until a man steps in. When Pato comes back to Leenane, Maureen starts a romance with him and has a chance to free herself from her mother's dominance. Worried about being left behind, Mag plays upon her senility to stop Maureen. The over-dependent relationship of the mother and daughter is disturbingly revealed when Maureen tries to separate and act on her own behalf. The mother and daughter keep attempting to assert their control over one another throughout the action and, by the end of the play, are forced to take extreme measures.

While McDonagh's images of western Irish women recall some of Synge's outlaw female characters, McDonagh's form of the grotesque is much darker than Synge's. Bakhtin discovers the positive and joyful elements in the bodily elements of grotesque realism: "The material bodily principle in grotesque realism is offered in its all-popular festive and utopian aspect."[15] "The grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world," and it interacts with the outside world (Bakhtin 26). The openness of the grotesque body blurs the boundary between inside and outside, regenerating the world through carnival death and carnival rebirth. Bakhtin describes grotesque body parts as "the apertures or the convexities, or [the] various

ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose" (26). The grotesque body is continually outgrowing and transgressing its own limits (26). McDonagh's female characters represent the kind of bodily images that Bakhtin finds in Rabelais's work: "images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life" (18). However, in McDonagh's world, the regenerative power of Bakhtin's grotesque turns into horror. The grotesque, which Bakhtin praises for its transgressive possibilities, leads to the kind of fatal identity crisis that Julia Kristeva described.

According to Kristeva, who was heavily influenced by Bakhtin, when a subject is confronted with the grotesque, the subject experiences sensations of disgust and revulsion. Kristeva describes the symptoms of this experience as "loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. . . .[It is] the spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck."[16] Kristeva calls such a dreadful feeling "abjection." Her theory of the abject locates the body, or more specifically, the orifices and products of these orifices, on the boundary between inside and outside. The abject disrupts identity, disturbs order and destabilizes systems. The abject "does not respect borders, positions, rules. [It is] the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4).

In "the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2), Martin McDonagh has constructed the abject world of his play. In *Beauty Queen*, Maureen confronts abjection as she struggles to reject her mother, whose maternal function is the source of abjection. The mother's relationship to her daughter is so close that it becomes

overwhelming in the demands it makes on the daughter. According to Kristeva, the womb and the maternal are "desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject" (54). In this chapter, I will use Kristeva's theory of abjection to explore McDonagh's grotesque representation of the mother-daughter relationship. I will begin by exploring Mag's dominance over Maureen, and then discuss Maureen's attempts to free herself from her mother's control. In Kristeva's terms, Mag is an "abject" mother. Unfortunately for Maureen as a female child, when she tries to reject her mother, she too will become abject.

When the play begins, we quickly become acquainted with Mag's grotesque ageing body. Mag has some typical health problems for a woman her age, such as a urine infection and a back problem. She also has a burned left hand, which is "somewhat more shriveled and red than her right" (3). When Maureen and her mother argue about whether Mag could make Complan by herself, Mag explains that she cannot because she is scared of burning herself. Maureen dismisses her mother's worries, saying that "you're just a hypochondriac is what you are" (5). Because of Mag's burned left hand, such an accusation seems too harsh. However, Mag soon reveals that she is overtly obsessed with her own bodily needs. She habitually asks Maureen to bring food. Soon after the argument about making Complan, Mag asks Maureen to make her porridge. Mag's constant demands are a way of asserting her control over her daughter. Whenever Maureen tries to express herself, Mag stops her by asking her to attend Mag's needs. Mag continues to ask her to turn the radio on and then to turn the volume down. After an argument over the use of Irish language, Mag asks Maureen to make her tea: "Me mug of tea you forgot!" (9). When Maureen

expresses her hatred for her mother, Mag, getting upset, demands that Maureen bring her some sugar.

Mag's bodily functions are characteristics of the grotesque body which both Bakhtin and Kristeva describe. Eating is a main motif in Bakthin's grotesque realism and a symptom of Kristeva's state of abjection. Mag is always eating mushy or starchy food such as Complan, porridge, sugar, shortbread fingers, or Kimberleys biscuits. Bakhtin praises the act of eating as a sign of the body's interaction with the world, but Kristeva relates eating to abjection: "food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (Kristeva 2). In *Beauty Queen*, mother and daughter use food to abuse each other since Maureen does not let Mag enjoy her food. While Mag overwhelms her daughter by constantly asking for food, Maureen responds by taking away food from her mother when Mag wants to eat or sometimes force-feeding her when she does not. Mag's constant complaints of illness are also a symptom of her obsession with her body. Whenever she engages in conversations, Mag complains of her urine infection, bad back, and burnt hand. Mag's grotesqueness resembles Rabelais's pregnant old hag to some extent: After Gargamelle consumes sixteen quarters, two bushels, and six pecks of tripe, her intestine falls out due to the overeating, and her labour starts at the moment (Bakhtin 221-23). Although she dies from over-eating tripe, Gargamelle gives birth to a son Gargantua. Therefore, Gargamelle's womb represents "the devoured and devouring womb of the earth and the ever-regenerated body of the people" (226). However, whereas Rabelais's Gargamelle embodies the regenerative body of the grotesque in *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* McDonagh's old hag embodies only the illness and

general deterioration of the aged body.

Mag's demands are very irritating to Maureen and push her to bursts of anger. Maureen despairs and rages against her situation, even wishing for her mother's death. After hearing about a murder in Dublin, Maureen confesses: "Sure, that sounds exactly the type of fella I would like to meet, and then bring him home to meet you, if he likes murdering oul women" (10). She also expresses her wish to be free from her mother's control when she tells about her dream of her mother's funeral: "I have a dream sometimes there of you, dressed all nice and white, in your coffin there, and me all in black looking in on you" (23). Although she wants to be "other than this," Maureen continues to acquiesce to her mother's demands (23). She seems resigned to her mother's vicious comments that she will never have a man:

> MAG. I will be hanging on forever!
>
> MAUREEN. I know well you will!
>
> MAG. Seventy you'll be at my wake, and then how many men'll there be round your waist with their aftershave?
>
> MAUREEN. None at all, I suppose.
>
> MAG. None at all is right! (24)

Maureen's situation is tragically grotesque in that she cannot resist her mother's dominance and hence remains compliant in an abusive relationship.

Concerned with only her own needs, Mag is extremely selfish. Her selfishness drives her to control her daughter obsessively, so that she will take care of her. When Maureen has a chance for some pleasure when her old schoolmate Pato arrives in Leenane, Mag maliciously starts sabotaging her daughter's relationship with him.

Mag is twice asked to deliver messages from Pato to Maureen. One message is Pato's invitation to a goodbye party for his uncle, and the other is a goodbye party for Pato himself. Ray Dooley, Pato's younger brother, leaves the first message for Maureen, and asks Mag to pass it to Maureen. As soon as he leaves, Mag destroys the message. Although she pretends nobody has visited the house, Mag gets caught in her lie. Maureen forces her mother to drink Complan, which Maureen intentionally makes lumpy as part of her revenge upon her mother:

> MAG. I do have a funny tummy, Maureen, and I do have no room.
>
> MAUREEN. Drink ahead, I said! You have room enough to be spouting your lies about Ray Dooley had no message! Did I not meet him on the road beyond as he was going? The lies of you. The whole of that Complan you'll drink now, and suck the lumps down too, and whatever's left you haven't drank, it is over your head I will be emptying it, and you know well enough I mean it! (21-22)

Maureen's abuse of her mother is minor this time, but the incident foreshadows the gruesome revenge Maureen will take in the future when Mag succeeds in interfering with Maureen's relationship with Pato again.

Ray appears in the play as a failed messenger who twice brings Pato's messages to the wrong person. However, Ray is more than a catalyst for disaster in *Beauty Queen*, for McDonagh expresses his criticism of contemporary society through him. Although his characterization easily slips into stereotype, Ray represents the new generation of the post-modern world. If we compare him to Shawn in *Playboy*, it becomes clear that McDonagh has moved beyond caring about representing

conventional morality. When the uptight Shawn accuses Christy of killing his father at the beginning of the play, Shawn becomes the object of ridicule. His submissiveness to authority makes him anti-heroic although his moral stance is conventionally right according to Catholic principles. By presenting Shawn in this way, Synge raises questions about Catholic morality and authority in *Playboy*, whereas in *Beauty Queen*, Ray represents the banalities of a post-modern world. Although his childish obsession with popular TV shows is ridiculous, it is also symptomatic. In scene two, Ray "*watches TV a moment*" as soon as he appears on stage (13). He comments upon TV shows whenever he talks to the other characters.[17] TV shows are his major source of entertainment, and thus he is upset at waiting for Maureen instead of watching TV: "A whole afternoon I'm wasting here. (*Pause*). When I could be at home watching telly" (56). Ray represents a media-obsessed younger generation.

However, Ray is also a victim of a hopelessly impoverished rural society.[18] A sense of deprivation drives the characters in McDonagh's *Beauty Queen* to be fascinated with violence. In Ray, this fascination stems from his frustration from living in a rural town where he is "continually bored" to the point that he wants to "clobber [police] again just for the fun of seeing the blood running out of them" (55). *Sons and Daughters* is Ray's favorite TV program because "everybody's always killing each other and a lot of the girls do have swimsuits" (52). His obsession with material objects also confirms a general sense of deprivation, characteristic of people living with chronic shortages. Ray still holds a grudge against Maureen because she did not return his tennis ball ten years ago. This obsession with trivial objects is

carried to a grotesque extreme at the end of the play when Maureen uses a poker to bash in Mag's head. Whereas Maureen wants to keep the poker for sentimental reasons, Ray insistently asks her to sell it to him, and his obsession with it adds an additional grotesque touch.

Both Ray and Maureen suffer from a similar lack of opportunity, but Maureen is more troubled by her own sexuality than by material objects. Her mother controls even Maureen's sexuality. Maureen confesses her frustration about being a virgin at forty years of age: "What have I ever done but kissed two men the past forty year?" (22). Virginity is an ideal of Catholic morality, but Maureen's virginity makes her feel inferior. She is frustrated because her sexuality is not acknowledged. Maureen thinks even being called a "whore" would be better than her present situation. After Pato Dooley arrives in Leenane, however, Maureen gets her one chance to escape her fate of becoming "a dried up oul [woman like her own mother]" (23).

Pato has returned from England for a goodbye party for his uncle. He is "*a good-looking man of about the same age as [Maureen]*" (27). Like Christy in *Playboy*, who fascinates all the village girls, Pato is exciting because he returns as an outsider. Pato does not even need the glamour of being a murderer to be popular with the girls, but he can be read as "a playboy of the west Ireland" because he has left the town for a better future in England. In McDonagh's Ireland, people want to leave for better jobs and chances: "that's Ireland, anyways. There's always someone leaving" (31). Pato has chosen to leave Leenane because of boredom and lack of opportunity. The young generation is only frustrated in Leenane, and Pato comments that "there never will be good work" for the young there (31). The other characters also express a

general eagerness to leave Ireland. Maureen has been to England once to work, although she came back to Leenane. Ray, Pato's younger brother, wants to go to England to look for a job: "London I'm thinking of going to. Aye. Thinking of it, anyways. To work, y'know. One of these days. Or else Manchester"(76). However, Pato is the only character in this play who has managed to escape, leaving behind the smothering life of a small town. His escape makes him different from the rest of the townspeople. Pato is able to look for a better future while the other characters are overwhelmed by the hopelessness of the present. He is also the only character who is not abusive or violent.

Although she sees herself as "a blessed fecking skivvy," Maureen begins to be transformed by Pato's courtship (6). When she comes back home with Pato from his uncle's goodbye party, they are "*both slightly drunk*," and they have a chance to have some time to themselves (27). When Pato calls her "the beauty queen of Leenane," Maureen becomes more autonomous in her behavior (30). She is not abusive or cruel this night, but transformed into a lover and asks Pato to stay for the night. Free from Mag's hovering eyes, Maureen is able to start a romance with Pato and to enjoy it. Their romance is beautifully represented when the stage is "*illuminated by the orange coals through the bars of the range*" (27). Although it is an oppressive place throughout the story, here the cottage becomes a space for love. Beginning a romance is a big step for Maureen in her struggle to free herself from her mother's control and become a free agent.

The next morning, "Mag *enters from the hall carrying a potty of urine, which she pours out down the sink*" (36). Mag reveals herself as an abject woman when she

appears with her urine. It is an object of scorn and shame and is also disturbing. According to Kristeva, bodily fluids such as urine and blood are threatening to subjects because they both indicate and transgress the border between the body and the external world: "My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. . . . [W]astes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit" (Kristeva 3). Naturally, the other characters in *Beauty Queen* are disgusted when they realize that Mag disposes of her urine in the sink.

Triumphantly recalling her sexual experience, Maureen appears on stage to enjoy her victory over her mother after spending the night with Pato. Maureen appears to her mother and Pato "*wearing only a bra and slip*," and she "*sits across Pato's lap*" (39). Maureen intends her explicit demonstration of her sexuality to torture her mother: "You'll have to be puttin'g that thing of yours in me again before too long is past, Pato. I do have a taste for it now" (39).

Maureen then brings up the subject of Mag's urine in order to humiliate her mother: "Doesn't she pour a potty of wee away down [in the sink] every morning, though I tell her seven hundred times the lavvy to use, but oh no" (41). Mag is frustrated when Maureen asks Pato to smell the sink. Pato "*leans into the sink, sniffs it, then pulls his head away in disgust*" (41). As Maureen continues humiliating her, Mag responds by interfering in Maureen's relationship. Although Maureen desperately tries to stop her, Mag tells Pato that Maureen was once in a mental hospital:

MAG. Forget wee! Forget wee! D'you want to know what Difford Hall is, fella?

MAUREEN. Shut up, now!

MAG. It's a nut-house! An oul nut-house in England I did have to sign her out of and promise to keep her in me care. Would you want to be seeing the papers now? (42)

Maureen's personal history of madness indicates that her subject position is unstable. Her mother's control makes being a subject difficult for Maureen. Isolated in a small cottage with only her mother, Maureen is too close to the maternal to acquire an autonomous identity. Maureen perceives her existence as abject. Ashamed about her mental breakdown, Maureen misunderstands Pato when he asks her to put on some clothes.

MAUREEN (*quietly*). 'Be putting on some clothes'? Is it ugly you think I am now, so, 'Be putting on some clothes…'

PATO. No, Maureen, the cold, I'm saying. You can't go walking about…You'll freeze, sure.

MAUREEN. It wasn't ugly you thought I was last night, or maybe it was, now.

PATO. No, Maureen, now. What…?

MAUREEN. A beauty queen you thought I was last night, or you said I was. When it's 'Cover yourself', now, 'You do sicken me'…. (46)

Maureen, after giving up Pato, is easily drawn back to her mother's control. Although he promises Maureen, "I'll write to you from England," Mag doesn't allow Maureen

any hope saying, "[He] won't write at all" (47). Mag drives Maureen to despair by ruining Maureen's new dress. Maureen accepts the fate that her mother forces her to believe in, and responds to her mother only in "*sad and despairing but not angry*" ways (47).

Maureen's black dress symbolizes the changes in her fortune. This dress symbolizes hope when she buys it for her meeting with Pato. When she wears the dress for her night with Pato, the dress suggests the possibility of a romance. The next morning, "*Maureen's black dress is lying across the table*" (36), symbolizing Maureen's realized romance, and her victory over her mother and the stifling moral conventions of her society. However, when Mag maliciously throws the dress away, it becomes a symbol of a destroyed relationship.

Mag's second interference in Maureen's relationship with Pato results in a disastrous response. As he promised to do, Pato writes a letter to Maureen, explaining his true feelings for her and asking her to go to America with him. Pato asks Ray to deliver the letter to Maureen, specifically requesting him to give the letter directly to her. However, Ray is not a reliable messenger, and he again fails to give the message to the right person. Mag burns the letter, preventing her daughter from leaving her. Mag is not competing with Maureen to get a man, but trying to possess her daughter completely. Discouraging her daughter from having any access to the symbolic, Mag maintains her superior status as a woman who was once married.

Listening to Pato recite the letter, the audience realizes that his reality is not as glorious as the townspeople imagine. In contrast to his playboy image, Pato's life in England is not glorious at all, and is nothing better than an animal's: "it's more or less

cattle I am" (31). Pato describes his living condition as "all pee-stained mattresses and [there is] nothing to do but watch the clock" (31). He makes a similar confession in his letter to Maureen. Pato describes an accident in which a Wexford man needed forty stitches in his head after bricks fell on him (48). His job as a manual worker is risky. Furthermore, the pay is not very good, and Pato is discriminated against because of his Irish nationality. Therefore, when his uncle offers him a job in Boston, he decides to move. He explains to Maureen that he did not look at her differently after he found out about her mental breakdown. He expresses his feeling towards Maureen: "I would have been honoured to be the first one you chose, and flattered, and the thing that I'm saying, I was honoured then and I am still honoured, and just because it was not to be that night, does it mean it is not to be ever?" (49). Then, he proposes that Maureen come with him to Boston and asks her, if she agrees, to meet him when he comes to Leenane two weeks later.

Sexuality is the most frustrating issue for Pato. Maureen wants to acquire some sexual experience, and she gets the chance to do so when Pato reveals his feelings for her. Before they spent a night together, Maureen projects a playboy image on him. She thinks Pato is popular among girls, believing he has "the rake of women [...] stashed all over" (32). In his romance with Maureen, Pato matches the playboy images that Maureen imagines. Pato easily express his feelings for her although he confesses he did not have enough courage to talk to her during the past twenty years: "It's took me all this time to get up the courage" (30). However, Pato's letter reveals that he was impotent during the night he spent with Maureen. He explains, "It has happened to me a couple of times before when I've had a drink taken and was nothing

to do with did I want to" (49). Pato is a failed playboy, and Maureen suffers from his failure to perform.

After waiting for Maureen irritates Ray, he leaves Pato's letter with Mag. Although she promises to hand it to Maureen, Mag reads the letter, finds out that Maureen is still a virgin, and she destroys it. When Pato returns for his farewell party, Maureen does not go because she feels slighted. However, Mag mistakenly mentions Pato's impotence and reveals her treachery. In order to learn the contents of Pato's letter, Maureen starts torturing Mag by pouring boiling oil on her hand. This torture scene reveals that Maureen has previously tortured her mother this way. Throughout the play, Mag's burned hand is mentioned several times. Mag accuses Maureen of burning it, but the audience has difficulty in believing that Maureen could be so sadistic. Her explanation sounds reasonable: "And, no, I didn't scould her oul hand, no matter how doolally I ever was. Trying to cook chips on her own, she was. We'd argued, and I'd left her on her own an hour, and chips she up and decided she wanted. She must've tipped the pan over" (45). However, the torturing of Mag leaves no doubt that Maureen was responsible for Mag's burned hand.

The torture scene is grotesquely staged, heightening its cruelty and intentionally terrifying the audience. Maureen boils some oil, and then "*takes her mother's shrivelled hand, holds it down on the burning range, and starts slowly pouring some of the hot oil over it*" (66). Mag is screaming in pain, but Maureen repeats the torture until she finds out that in the letter, Pato asked her to go to America. "*In a happy daze*," Maureen *"throws the considerable remainder of the oil into [Mag's] midriff, some of it splashing up into her face*" (68). Maureen decides to

go to the train station to meet Pato before he leaves for America. She leaves behind Mag's tortured body: "*[Mag] doubles-up, screaming, falls to the floor, trying to pat the oil off her, and lies there conversing, screaming, and whimpering*" (68).

Later, Mag's dead body appears on stage, sitting in a rocking chair. Although the murder is not staged, the audience realizes that Maureen has used a poker to kill her mother. This scene is made particularly grotesque for the audience, who does not know for some time that Mag is dead, especially since the rocking chair is moving back and forth on its own. Meanwhile, an excited Maureen recounts her assumed last conversation with Pato at the train station. She appears finally to have won the war with her mother and to be about to have a new life in America with Pato. Maureen describes meeting him at a train station just before he was about to leave for Boston and also describes the new life she is going to have in America. Suddenly, the ghastly reality of Mag's death is horribly revealed. As Maureen chatters happily, "*[Mag] starts to slowly lean forward at the waist until she finally topples over and falls heavily to the floor, dead. A red chunk of skull hangs from a string of skin at the side of her head*" (72).

Until Ray visits Maureen, the audience does not realize that Maureen's encounter with Pato at the train station never happened. Maureen hears that he is going to marry a second cousin of his uncle, "Dolores Hooley, or Healey" in Boston (79). Realizing that she has lost him, Maureen behaves like her mother, and the distinction between her and her mother disappears. Before Ray leaves, Maureen repeats her mother's behavior, asking him to turn the radio up and to close the door, just as Mag did earlier in the play. Maureen is acting exactly like Mag, as Ray's

irritation indicates: "The exact fecking image of your mother you are, sitting there pegging orders and forgetting me name!" (83). Even after killing her mother, Maureen cannot free herself from her. Although she tries to escape from her abject status, Maureen is doomed to follow in her mothers' footsteps. Maureen will remain trapped in her mother's house mentally as well as physically.

McDonagh's dramatic world is indebted to Synge's, but McDonagh deliberately subverts the Irish dramatic tradition. In *Beauty Queen*, McDonagh portrays woman at her most victimized, and he represents the mother-daughter relationship as one of abjection. In the Symbolic, there is no such Oedipal resolution for the daughter. McDonagh attempts to show that women become abject in a patriarchal society. Maureen does not want to give up her maternal power over her daughter, and therefore the maternal is threatening to the daughter. Maureen tries to humiliate her mother Mag, but is confronted with her own identity crisis when she tries to have a relationship with Pato. When she kills her mother, however, Maureen loses her own identity and becomes abject. Thus, McDonagh's focus on the entrapment of his female characters contrasts with Synge's treatment of the artist playboy who escapes from both his father and the villagers. For women there is no possible resolution of the Oedipal conflict. Daughters may actually kill their mothers but can never get away from them because daughters have nowhere to go.

[1] Fintan O'Toole, "Shadows over Ireland" American Theater July-Aug. 1998. March 2004 http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=798095&db=aph

[2] José Lanters, "Playwrights of the Western World: Synge, Murphy, McDonagh," A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage, ed. Stephen Watt, Eileen Morgan, and Shakir Mustafa (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2000) 213.

[3] Fintan O'Toole, "Nowhere Man," Irish Times 26 Apr. 1997.

[4] The Beauty Queen of Leenane was first presented at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway, on February 1, 1996, and subsequently opened at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs on March 5, 1996. It opened in the United States at the Atlantic Theatre Co., New York, on February 26, 1998, and at the Walter Kerr Theatre, New York, on April 23, 1998. *A Skull in Connemara* was first presented at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway, on June 3, 1997, and opened at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs on July 17, 1997. *The Lonsome West* was first presented at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway, on June 10, 1997, and opened at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs on July 19, 1997.

[5] Fintan O'Toole, "Martin McDonagh," BOMB Spring, 1998: 64.

[6] After his Leenane trilogy, McDonagh completed the Aran trilogy, each play in it set on one of three Aran Islands. *The Cripple of Inishmaan* was performed at the Royal National Theater on January 7, 1997. It made its US debut in New York on April 1998, following the extraordinary success of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. *The Cripple of Inishmaan* is based on a real event that occurred when Robert Flaherty was making his historic documentary *Man of Aran* during the 1930s. McDonagh's second play in his Aran trilogy is *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. See Mark Lawson, "Sick-buckets needed in the stalls," Guardian 28 April 2001. 22 May 2004 http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,479823,00.html. *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* has been so controversial that "it's a brave move for anyone to stage this play". Although McDonagh claims it is the best play he has written, both the National Theatre and the Royal Court turned down the script for its political provocation and its violent content. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre finally premiered it on April 18, 2001. Set in 1993 in County Galway on the Island of Inishmore, the plot of *Lieutenant* focuses on a cat loving Irish terrorist. McDonagh has again been accused of presenting stereotypical Irish characters in his drama. This time, he deals with the sensitive issue of Northern Ireland's violence, with his savage humor and gory violence on stage. *The Pillowman* opened at London's National Theatre on November 13, 2003. *Pillowman* is scheduled for Broadway opening on October 17, 2004. The third part of the Aran trilogy, *The Banshees of Inishmore* is yet to be produced.

[7] Steven Price, Martin McDonagh: A Staged Irishman," Cycnos 18.1(2001) 109. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[8] Sean O'Hagan, "The Wild West," Guardian 24 Mar. 2001. 22 May 2004 http://www.guardian.co.uk/weekend/story/0,,461983,00.html

[9] O'Toole, "Nowhere Man."

[10] See Rick Lyman "Most Promising Playwright, " New York Times Magazine 25 January 1998: 19. McDonagh discussed his interest in creating a more exciting experience for theatre audiences than other playwrights provide: "There are times when people in the audiences are hit with bits of stuff flying off the stage, mostly skulls. There's one point where a stove suddenly explodes. I love to be in the theater and watch that. The people in the audience jump out of their skins".

[11] Martin McDonagh, The Beauty Queen of Leenane and Other Plays (New York: Vintage, 1998).

[12] Shaun Richards, "The outpouring of a morbid, unhealthy mind: the critical condition of Synge and

McDonagh," Irish University Review: a Journal of Irish Studies 33.1 (2003) 205.

[13] Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, Sheila Faria Glaser, trans. (MI: U of Michigan P, 2000) 2.

[14] O'Toole, "Shadows over Ireland."

[15] Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge: M.I.T., 1965) 19. (additional page references will be included in the text)

[16] Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 2. (additional page references will be included in the text)
As an example of the abject, Kristeva describes the gagging sensation and nausea caused by the skin of milk: "When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk—harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring—I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasm in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me", who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*" (Kristeva 2-3).

[17] All of three TV Shows Ray mentions (*The Sullivans*, *Sons and Daughters*, and *A Country Practice*) are Australian. Ray watches *The Sullivans* when he visits Mag in Scene Two. *The Sullivans* (1976-1983) is set in a Melbourne suburb. The Sullivans and their friends and relatives cope with hardships during World War II. *Sons and Daughters* (1982-1988) dealt with the intertwined lives of two families - the working class Palmers and the well-off Hamiltons. Angela Hamilton falls for John Palmer. However, The blossoming romance between Angela and Johan is stopped short when it is discovered they are brother and sister. *A Country Practice* (1981-1993 and 1994). For over a thousand episodes, viewers followed the lives of the residents of rural Wandin Valley, a fictional location in rural New South Wales. Although this series presented the general peace of the rural community, it often dealt with the illnesses or deaths encountered in the medical practice.

[18] Martin McDonagh has been accused of creating a false impression of rural Ireland today by referring to their impoverishment. However, his world is only a fiction.

# Conclusion

While idealized Stage Irishwomen are constructed according to patriarchal and nationalistic ideals of femininity, Synge, O'Casey, and McDonagh's female characters are notable exceptions to this rule. During a century of strife in Irish politics, each of these playwrights created female characters whose stories reflected the social and political realities of their time. In this thesis, I discussed these playwrights' works in the context of their contemporary social and political background. Instead of defining their works as intentionally "feminist," I focused on the degree to which they challenged traditional representations of Irish women. In each of my three chapters, I discussed a playwright's background and then analyzed his best-known play, focusing on its female characters, mother-daughter relationship, and their deviation from traditional norms.

In J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, the female characters are grotesque to the point of fighting over an assumed father-killer. When the village girls come to see Christy, they appear as "a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself" (226). They follow Christy to indulge in their bodily activities. However, Synge's grotesque world is grounded in reality, so that his female characters are saved from becoming mere fantasy-born monstrous creatures in a spectacle of a fantasy world. Therefore, the main female characters, Pegeen Mike and Widow Quin, who are the most grotesquely portrayed, are also representatives of peasant women marginalized in western Irish society during the early twentieth century. Synge creates two opposite female figures: a young virgin and a widow. Pegeen is a young virgin waiting for an unwanted marriage. Because she does not have any choice, she

will marry a cowardly man, Shawn Keogh, as her father wishes. She is her father's daughter and is resigned to being handed over to a new patriarch. On the other hand, Widow Quin does not belong to the play's patriarchal community because she is a murderer guilty of her husband's death.

With the arrival of Christy, however, Synge makes the community's hierarchy collapse. Christy is an assumed father-killer, and the women's admiration of him indicates their temporary liberation from patriarchy. Although she is her father's daughter, Pegeen is transformed into an autonomous subject during the carnival, and she freely chooses and receives Christy's love. Her antagonist is Widow Quin, an Oedipal mother figure who wants to marry her son figure, Christy. Synge's representation of Widow Quin, a sexual mother, challenges the patriarchal model of the mother as a chaste nurturer. As Luce Irigaray argues, representing women as the maternal-feminine results in the "obliteration of women as women" (cited in Whitford 27). Although Synge's play has no actual mothers and daughters, the relationship between Widow Quin and Pegeen, can be read as a surrogate mother-daughter relationship. Widow Quin differs from the Freudian-model mother whose lack of a penis evokes her daughter's contempt, resulting in the daughter's acceptance of her inferiority to men. Synge's play inverts the Freudian competition between mother and daughter by portraying Widow Quin as willing to let her daughter be with the man she loves. After Widow Quin quits her competing with Pegeen, Christy and Pegeen's romance enables Pegeen to accept her female sexuality.

However, Pegeen lacks Christy's kind of transforming imagination. She loves only her fantasy of him as a playboy. Once Christy leaves, Pegeen remains in her

patriarchal world even though she has been responsible for her lover's transformation into a real playboy. Widow Quin remains an outsider in her community, which will never accept her. The mother-daughter relationship disappears after Christy leaves. Pegeen reassumes her social role as her father's daughter, waiting for her wedding with Shawn, even though she does not want to marry him.

Sean O'Casey creates his female characters more realistically in *Juno and the Paycock*. O'Casey came to the Abbey with bitter opinions about Irish politics in the aftermath of the Easter Rising and Civil War. Therefore, O'Casey's world is more pessimistic than Synge's, and he wants to show the failings of the Irish people to his audience. He uses realism differently than Synge does, as O'Casey aims to represent the harsh life of the Dublin slums. However, O'Casey incorporates the grotesque and symbolism into his play in order to avoid simply reiterating the dominant ideology naturalizing the Civil war. I focused on O'Casey's realistic female characters to show how he uses them to subvert the mythic constructions of Irish women. O'Casey questions the stability of the patriarchal symbolic realm through his representation of failed patriarchs and revolutionary women who recognize the failings of their men and learn to speak out against their exploitive relationships. The process of the female characters' growing self-recognition becomes an important plot element in *Juno and the Paycock*. O'Casey also creates a real mother character, Juno Boyle, and shows her relationship with her real daughter, Mary Boyle. Her name alludes to the original Juno, a goddess mother in Roman mythology, and O'Casey's Juno is also a figure of Cathleen ni Houlihan, a symbol of a colonized mother Ireland. O'Casey deconstructs the myth of the perfect mother in *Juno and the Paycock*. In reality, the social

constructs of both idealizing mother and blaming mother come from the fantasy of the perfect mother, which has led to "the cultural oppression of women in the [interest of a children]" (Chodorow 90) and of patriarchal society. The myth of the perfect mother leads to such impossible expectations that a mother is blamed for any failings in her children or family life. At the beginning of *Juno and the Paycock*, Juno tries to be a perfect mother. Therefore, she devotes herself to her family and children although all her efforts are unacknowledged.

Mary's name alludes to the other impossible female archetype of patriarchal mythology, the virgin mother. O'Casey's Mary breaks the ideal of virginity through her sexuality. O'Casey represents Mary as an independent woman who tries to become an agent in her own life. Therefore, Mary is characterized as a revolutionary, a tenement woman who reads Ibsen, and a daughter who tries to differ from her sacrificing mother. First, O'Casey shows Juno's unwillingness to give up her narcissistic relationship with her daughter. However, Juno is changed into a supportive mother after suffering the loss of her son. Juno abandons her attempts to be a perfect mother, walks away from her drunkard husband, and accepts her daughter as a separate individual. Therefore, she begins to separate herself from patriarchal values. However, Juno and Mary cannot entirely escape from patriarchy. They can leave their husband and father, but they cannot leave a patriarchal society. In spite of their courage in breaking social conventions, Juno and Mary step out into a world where other Boyle-like patriarchs dominate.

Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is the most pessimistic and grotesque of the three plays. Coming from a post-modern generation, and being less

concerned with conventional morality than Synge and O'Casey were, McDonagh is also more aggressive in destroying traditions, particularly, the romanticized images of women and mother-daughter relationships. In McDonagh's world, the Bakhtinian grotesque is turned into the horror of abjection. In his fictional small town of Leenane in western Ireland, which he peoples with marginalized wretches, he portrays his female characters as even more isolated than the male characters. Going further than Synge and O'Casey, he turns his daughter character, Maureen, into an older and bitter Pegeen Mike, and his mother character, Mag, into an extreme version of the dominating Juno Boyle. The grotesque loses its regenerative power in McDonagh's world, and his female characters keep abusing each other until the end when they collapse into total abjection. The mother and daughter dominate the stage in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, and their relationship is its central focus. McDonagh questions what a mother can do for her daughter when women are deprived of all opportunities. Maternal feelings are not love and devotion in McDonagh's world. The isolated circumstances of their lives make it easy for Mag to manipulate her daughter, so Mag does not worry about her daughter's attempts to revolt against her. Mag turns her daughter into a double of herself, while simultaneously claiming superior status to her. Therefore, the internal struggle of Maureen to separate from her mother becomes desperate. Maureen struggles to get away from her mother's dominance, and with arrival of Pato, she has a chance to claim her own identity. To defend her identity, Maureen kills her mother, but in the process becomes identical to her. Through her attempts to remove her abject mother, Maureen becomes the abject. Maureen is not

allowed to separate herself as a daughter, and women have no position as subjects in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*.

Together, Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, and McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* reveal two different approaches to challenging and subverting traditional representations of women in Irish drama. Although O'Casey is more realistic than Synge, both of three playwrights sexualize Irish drama's idealized mother and virgin figures, and allow them to rebel against patriarchy, but then leave them trapped in it. McDonagh goes further in savaging traditional constructions of female archetypes. His mother and virgin figures are an emotionally brutal old hag and her hate-filled, sadistic daughter, both locked in a hellish relationship that leads to madness, torture, and murder. McDonagh's female characters have no redeeming qualities and leave the audience gasping at his audacity in completely destroying Ireland's treasured idealization of the Good Mother and the Sacred Virgin.

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